POLYHEDRON

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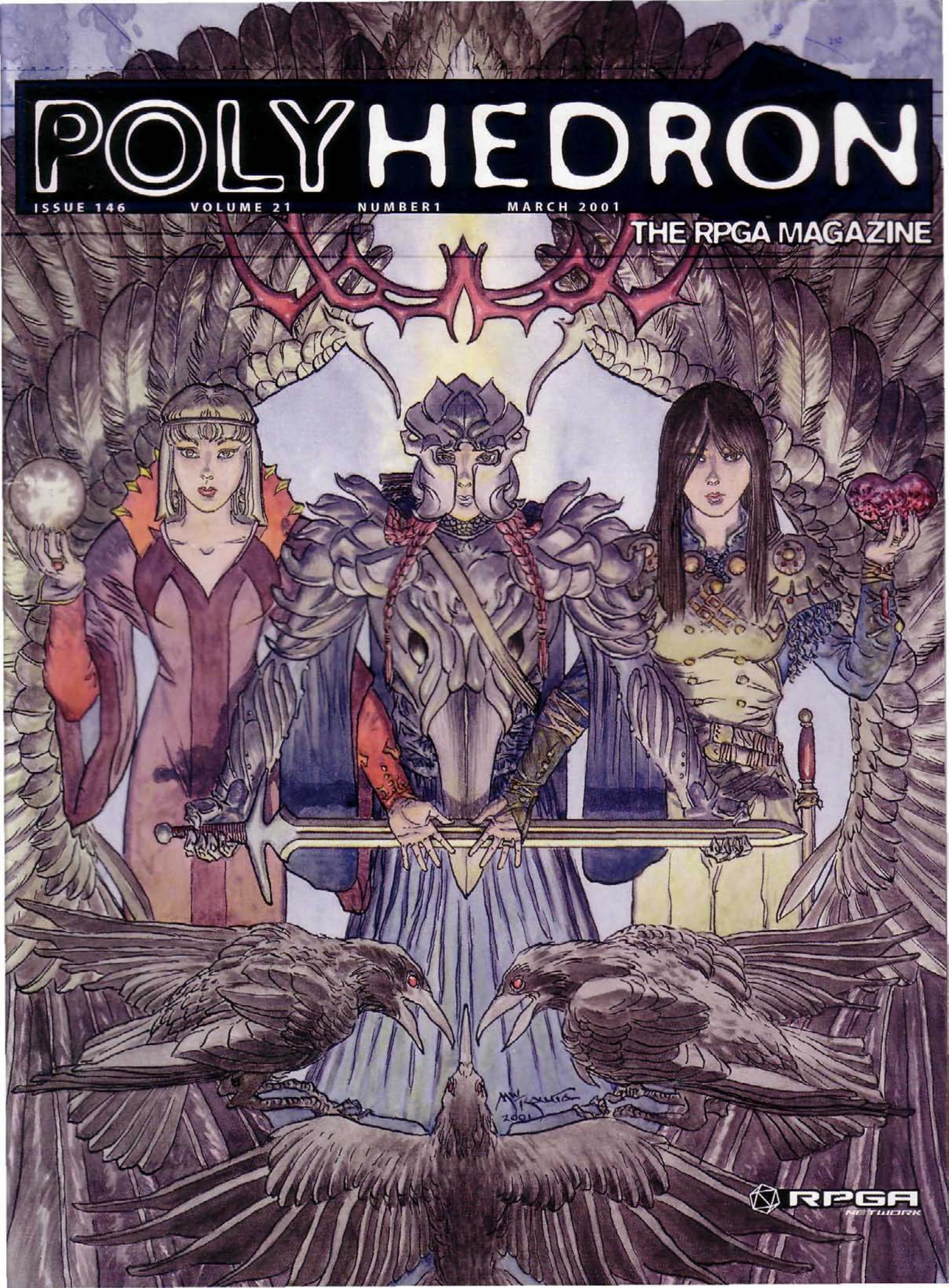
THE RPGA MAGAZINE



RPGA NETWORK

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Money, Power, and Certs

WE JUMPED THE GUN!

Last issue, we debuted the new price structure for RPGA memberships a tad before non-US rates had been completely solidified. The list below reflects the true price structure. The first price listed is for standard GUILD-LEVEL™ membership. The third is for Family members, who receive all play benefits of Guild-level members (including a card) but no magazines or mailings. The third is for a three-year GUILD-LEVEL membership.

Members of the International Community: Renew fast and renew often!

US and Continental Europe: $US30/$US10/$US80
UK: £18/£6/£50
Canada and Mexico: $US35/$US10/$US90
Australia: $A45/$A15/$A125
Rest of APAC: $A50/$A18/$A135
South Africa: R60/$US10/R170
All Other Areas: $US50/$US10/$US125

NEW BOSSES FOR RAVENS BLUFF

The LIVING CITY™—Ravens Bluff campaign is experiencing some important changes at the senior management level, both on the board and at HQ. For some time now, members have listed poor communications as one of their greatest frustrations with the campaign. To address this concern, we've created a new board position called Public Relations Director. The PR Director is tasked with communicating board announcements to the membership and monitoring Internet mailing lists to direct questions to the staffers best suited to answer them. He also will maintain FAQs and important campaign documents. Troy Daniels, who has been serving as Board Chair and Plot Director, will fill this important position. You can contact Troy at lctroy@rpga.net.

Metagame Director Cindy Mullins has resigned. All metagame volunteers now report directly to Scott Magner until a replacement can be found. Metagame activity will continue.

Speaking of Scott Magner, the RPGA's Games Coordinator will take on direct oversight of the campaign on behalf of HQ, and assumes the position previously held by the Board Chair. Scott also will oversee the overall plot of the campaign, and the Plots staff is hereby disbanded. Robert Wiese, the HQ staffer previously responsible for the campaign, will continue to edit scenarios, but no longer has any role in managing the campaign.

Greg Sherwood remains in his position as "R&D Director," which keeps him busy gathering information on campaign expansions such as the elven and dwarven kingdoms and Procampur.

Please direct all campaign-related questions to Scott Magner at bhagwan@wizards.com. Any LC—RB question sent to other staffers will be forwarded to Scott; he is the one HQ source of answers about the campaign, and the final arbiter of campaign policy. Authors should continue to send scenarios to robertw@wizards.com, but should CC Scott on all submissions and queries.

STILL SITTING ON ROTTING 2E CERTS?

HQ and the LIVING CITY™—Ravens Bluff board members realize that, though we did the best we could to publicize the accelerated conversion of magic items to Third Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® through articles in *Polyhedron* and letters (both electronic and old fashioned), we could not have reached every member.

Therefore, to accommodate those members living in caves or deep jungles, we're extending the conversion of magic items through the spring.

Sort of.

Here's the deal. If you're a GUILD-LEVEL or Family RPGA member, you may convert 20 magic item certificates for a fee of USD $20. That's $1 per certificate. Item conversions still follow the rules in place during the first phase, but now you get fewer items and have to pay extra for them. Members who have already converted items may not use this opportunity to add more items to their prior conversion request or to convert additional items. You can find the rules for submitting

conversion requests at www.wizards.com/rpga/lc/conversion.asp. We strongly prefer online submissions of conversion requests, and online requests are processed faster than requests by mail using the forms. Once you submit a request for item conversion, you can expect to receive your items within eight weeks.

This offer is good until *Origins* 2001, or for requests postmarked by June 25, 2001. This is the last chance to get any items converted, so please don't miss it.

SPEND YOUR SERVICE POINTS!

The RPGA really values its members, especially those who give of themselves to help other members have a great time. Throughout its history, the Network has awarded service points to members who help us out, and in the past those points added to a member's judge ranking. Now, we have a new and better way to let you use those service points.

WE'RE GIVING YOU STUFF FOR THEM!

That's right. You can now redeem your RPGA service points for actual stuff. We've tried to make this as easy for you as possible.

WHO CAN REDEEM SERVICE POINTS?

GUILD-LEVEL and Family RPGA members whose account information is correct may redeem service points. FELLOWSHIP-LEVEL™ members may accumulate service points, but may not redeem them.

WHAT CAN YOU GET?

The list of cool stuff you can get by spending service points just keeps growing and growing.

As of now, you can redeem points for:

- RPGA GUILD-LEVEL and Family memberships for yourself or for someone else (cost 200 points for GUILD-LEVEL, 100 for Family)

- Gift certificates to the Wizards of the Coast online store for yourself or someone else (10 points per dollar of credit)

Watch this space and the Members Only area of the RPGA Web site for more cool stuff, including the ability to play special characters in one of our LIVING™ campaigns.

HOW CAN YOU EARN SERVICE POINTS?

This is the easiest part. All you have to do is help out. Any of the following will earn you service points:

- Work at a convention (50 points per day of the show you work)
- Run the RPGA events at a convention (200 points per convention; game days do not qualify)
- Charity work (5 points per dollar donated to charity)
- Playtesting (20 points per scenario or product playtested)
- Membership Recruitment (20 points per GUILD-LEVEL member you recruit—member must identify you as the reason he or she joined when he or she signs up)
- Campaign Management and Coordination (varies by level of involvement)
- Serving as Regional Director or Area Coordinator (varies by level of involvement)
- Writing adventures that are sanctioned into our scenerio library (100 points per round)

Other things earn you points too. In addition to the above, you earn service points for anything we ask you to do specifically, or anything you work out with us in advance that you are doing. We are pretty flexible on this; if you do something that benefits the members or grows the RPGA, we'll give you service points.

The key to earning service points is reporting them to us. We track some service incidents automatically, but others have to be reported to us. Convention coordinators have to report service for their workers, for example. Basically, if you think we'd have to be psychic to know about the service you've done, report it. Include the RPGA numbers of anyone involved; we won't look them up for you.

Check your member account to see how many you have, and then proceed to the redemption form in the Members Only area of the Web site to request redemption. It's that simple.

WORLD'S BIGGEST LIVING CITY GAME

This Memorial Day weekend, Reno, Nevada's *Con2001* will host the biggest LIVING CITY-Ravens Bluff experience ever. *Queen of the Merchants* is a two-day adventure that you play from Saturday morning to Sunday afternoon. No breaks, no marshaling, nothing to distract from the mood. Wander into the tavern, stop at a metagame booth, or buy some fruit from a street vendor. Even the vendor may have an adventure for you. Played in four time slots with plenty of interactive time between them, this "adventure" consists of 20 separate scenario rounds covering one main story with several parts.

Queen of the Merchants

promises to be an event unlike anything you have played before, so bring your costumes, your character, and your wits to Reno for this one-of-a-kind LIVING CITY experience. Convention information can be found at the *Con2001* Web site (http://home.att.net/~con2001/index.htm). This adventure has space for 100 players only, so be sure to register in advance if you plan to play.

NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

ASIA-PACIFIC

Summer holidays are over and conventions are starting up again. January saw the 10th Anniversary of New Zealand's *Kapcon*, named (like its better-known counterpart in the US) after the location at which it was first run—Kapiti. It was my first New Zealand convention, and it was a real eye-opener. Kiwi cons are quite different than those in the US and Australia, with a very relaxed atmosphere featuring few prescheduled games. It reminded me most of the old days of WINTER FANTASY™, when players put their names on a whiteboard and tables ran when they were filled up.

Kapcon was small by US standards, around 70 people all told. Keep in mind though that the entire population of New Zealand is less than 5 million people, and from what I saw they all know how to have a good time. The con kicked off with a social evening on Friday night at one of Wellington's numerous pubs—a chance to meet lots of people and sink a few New Zealand beers.

Saturday morning was the start of gaming, and with both Bob Beck and Tony Dooley beating their drums, the biggest RPGA thing going was LIVING GREYHAWK™. Two-hour lunch breaks gave a chance to try some of the locals' answer to Cheapass Games, and I found *Cow* to be lots of fun. The con finished off with Tony running a *Call of Cthulhu* classic and having the nasty slimy things kill all but one of the PCs. It'd been a long time since I'd played *CoC* (or anything else for that matter) and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

While many North American members were enjoying WINTER FANTASY, some of the more active members in Australia were busy with *CANCON*, running a D&D® Classic and (you guessed it) LIVING GREYHAWK. Mark Somers and Geoff Skellams ran the games with the assistance of several of the Naughty Weasels club. Sadly, the current organizers of *CANCON* don't place a high priority on role-playing and it's unlikely there will be any at the show next year. But the news isn't all bad. *Arcanacon*, which used to run in July, moved to January this year and many people made the trek to Melbourne for that event. Scheduling glitches meant there was no RPGA event at *Arcanacon* for the first time in almost ten years, but that was no doubt a one-off occurrence.

Speaking of WINTER FANTASY, it was nice to collect the 2000 Clubs Decathlon trophy on behalf of the Naughty Weasels. It's the second time an Australian club has placed—the (now defunct) Brisbane League of Adventurers got second or third in the early to mid 90's. Surely that's proof enough for other clubs in this region, and elsewhere outside of North America, to have a go. What do you have to lose?

The 2001 Decathlon won't be so easy for the Weasels, since the club President, Geoff Skellams, is moving to Brisbane and has "threatened" to start a rival club there.

WES NICHOLSON
ASIA-PACIFIC BRANCH MANAGER
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EUROPE

Hail and well met from the continent of Europe! We've had an overwhelming response from new members joining these last two months. This generated a whole new problem we had to deal with. A lot of you European members wanted to enter the Members Only section on our Web page, but lo and behold, it didn't work. Some of you emailed me to ask what you were doing wrong. The answer is simple—your first-time password for these pages is your postal code. If your country has a postal code with letters, please use capitals and don't leave a space between the numbers and letters. We will be changing the Web page as soon as possible so that it will be clear for all those visiting the page. If for some strange reason it still doesn't work, please feel free to contact me at the address below.

A lot of activity and conventions are being planned on the continent. Although we are not planning a GEN CON® Benelux this year, there are two large conventions in the first half of 2001 that will more or less make up for the absence. Germany will host the second *Fantasy Spiel Fest* this year in

Braunfels from July 27–29. In addition, Holland is preparing a very large convention called the *Elf Fantasy Fair*. It is going to be held in a fantasy theme park called Archeon (Alphen a/d Rijn) from April 7–8, 2001. Both of those conventions are going to be the place to be this year. Perhaps we'll see you there. Drop us an email if you are interested in attending or volunteering and we'll get you in contact with the organisers.

Last time, we saw an article on a convention in Italy published in *Polyhedron* and I would like to see this trend continue. If you attend a European convention, write an account of your experience to share with the world. Send it to me and I'll forward it to the magazine staff, who is eager to show gaming activity from around the globe.

May the Moon keep you safe.

ANN VAN DAM
EUROPEAN BRANCH MANAGER
rpgaeurope@wizards.be

UNITED KINGDOM, IRELAND, AND SOUTH AFRICA

And so the campaigning season begins. With winter a very distant memory the year finds us once again on the campaign trail offering games to the members the length and breadth of the UK and South Africa.

January saw us at WINTER FANTASY (see *On the Trail* for more on that gathering) and Crusade, a small but growing convention in South Wales where we ran a number of tables of LIVING GREYHAWK throughout the day.

February had the RPGA attending *PAWS*, in Plymouth, Devon and *Fantasy/Sci-Fi Partisan*, Midlands England with us again running several tables of introductory Third Edition D&D games, plus LG.

At press time, we're putting the finishing touches to the inaugural RPGA Euro Summit, being held at *Conception*, in Bournemouth, England. This will be the first such event outside of WINTER FANTASY USA and is intended to mirror this excellent event, albeit in a small but perfect way, with an emphasis on socialising and roleplaying. I'll report more on the outcome in the next issue. If successful we may look to repeat this type of event later in the year at a different location.

Through the rest of March we will be attending *Compulsion*, Edinburgh, Scotland and *Towercon*, Blackpool, England. Again more in next issue.

This year your Association is looking to support and run more games at more shows throughout the UK. This means we have over 24 events listed already. To stay informed on developments in Sarbreenar, LIVING GREYHAWK, and now LIVING FORCE, plus events we're attending/running, check out the Web site at www.rpgauk.com. The site has had a huge overhaul in the winter months, with several new features being added. All thanks must go to Ratty, Megan Robertson, Andrew Hewson, and Rob Silk. The most significant changes came in the Members Only area. Check it out and tell us what you think!

In sunny (how I wish I was there) South Africa, Andre and Richard are continuing to run their hugely successful RPGA games days every month and things are starting to come together for the Dullstrand region of the LIVING GREYHAWK campaign setting. You can view what's happening in Dullstrand or get more information about the next gamesdays and other activities by visiting the main RPGA SA website at www.rpga.co.za.

IAN RICHARDS
UK, IRELAND, AND SOUTH AFRICA BRANCH MANAGER
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NEXT MONTH: LIVING GREYHAWK JOURNAL #4

Since the Great Migrations, ancient magical secrets have been locked in the enigmatic edifice known as the Lonely Tower, headquarters of the Silent Ones of Keoland. This arcane brotherhood has for centuries guarded the Sheldomar Valley against the evils of bygone ages by tracking down old books and artifacts and locking them away from prying eyes. But is there a sinister core at the heart of the order? Does their agenda transcend the simple protection of Keoland and its vassals? *Living Greyhawk Gazetteer* co-author Gary Holian reveals the secrets the Silent Ones would die to keep hidden in a huge article on the order. *Gem of the Flanaess* returns (honest) with a look at Clerkburg, seat of Greyhawk's intelligencia and countless dangerous plots. The Fiend-Sage has four more monsters for his twisted *Enchiridion*, and, as usual, news from around the Flanaess! Check it out in thirty days...

State of the Network Address

BY DAVID WISE, WORLDWIDE RPGA MANAGER

The following is a write-up of the "State of the Network" speech delivered at WINTER FANTASY™ 2001, by Worldwide Manager David Wise, with a few additions and clarifications.

HAPPY 20TH ANNIVERSARY, RPGA!

In 1980, *Dragon*® Magazine editor Paul Jaquet suggested the formation of an association to promote roleplaying games, which then-CEO Gary Gygax proposed to name the "International DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® and Advanced DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Role-Players Association." (The "ID&DAD&DRPA!") In January of 1981, the more succinctly named RPGA® Network sent out its first membership cards, club pins, and letters of welcome. It's been a heck of a rollercoaster ride since then, but hundreds of thousands of members have come and gone over the years, and tens of hundreds of thousands of games have been played (and maybe even millions—we don't know for sure)!

Over the last year, the RPGA has had more ups than downs, but there have been some of both. In my following remarks, I will touch on most or all of them. I believe that the members want to hear the whole story—that they'll appreciate our gains, and sympathize with our setbacks, if they have more information. When I assumed the position of RPGA "Big Cheese-head," I told WotC management that I was going to be very forthcoming with the members about both the good and the bad, and that any "spin" I might put on issue would be obvious—and they agreed that I should do so. I hope that many of you have noticed this increased effort to be open with the members. Just the same, I think we can do even better here, as in many parts of our operations, and I intend to keep working toward improving the RPGA every day, every week, and every month of the year.

I'm going to give you a general, bullet-point report on the RPGA last year and this year, and give you a quick look ahead to next year, but first I want to begin with a quick explanation of what's been happening at WotC/Hasbro over the last year. First, with respect to the RPGA, the news has been very good. For a very long time, the RPGA has been a sort of sideline for the RPG business—something we did simply because we wanted to provide roleplayers with a community. However, when it came to the business of making games, we made 'em, and you bought 'em, and that was just like most businesses worked. These days, thanks in great part to the Internet, the customer is much closer to the business and plays a much more pivotal role in business decisions. In keeping with that, the WotC RPG business management has identified the RPGA as a tangible, identifiable manifestation if its customer base, and therefore the role of the RPGA has changed. Allow me to share a few parts of the latest business-strategy document (slightly edited to bring salient points together):

Our strategy for growing the revenue of the Tabletop RPG Category is to increase the value of the network by extending and deepening our Metagame offerings. The purpose of the RPG Metagame is to build and enfranchise a community of roleplayers. In order for the Third Edition D&D® product launch to extend and grow beyond a short, one- or two-year spike in the business, it is essential to develop our Organized Play opportunities. The RPGA serves as the delivery channel for this goal, promoting the growth of the RPG business community both domestically and internationally.

"Metagame" refers to the whole experience of being in the RPG hobby, but it is more specifically defined in the document, in this order, as 1) RPGA, 2) Periodicals, 3) Website, 4) Conventions, 5) Merchandising. In other words, the RPGA figures prominently in most or all of the "Metagame" strategy.

Why is this important?

Because as the Network grows, so does its voice in the halls of WotC, and in the hobby industry in general. Smart businesses listen very closely to their core customers, and the RPGA is emerging as the definition of the "core customer."

Now, on the down side of what's been going on at WotC/Hasbro over the last year, the amazing Pokémon boom is coming to an end. While WotC continues to be a healthy and profitable company, the "pennies" (maybe I should say "gold pieces") that have been "raining from Heaven" over the last few years are going to slow down in the future. As an analogy, imagine that you earn $100,000 a year—pretty nice, 'eh? Next, suppose that you win a lottery, and for five years you make an extra $1 million a year. When those five years come to an end, you might still be earning that $100K, but you're going to miss that extra annual million, and you're probably going to have to adjust your spending habits. This is a bit like what WotC is going through these days. No matter how healthy a company might be, it can't help but shrink under these circumstances, and it therefore has to tighten its belt even if it continues to earn handsome profits from the rest of its products.

Amidst this change in revenues, the WotC RPG business is indeed profitable and growing. Third Edition D&D is a smash success, and we expect it to continue to be so for years to come. Nevertheless, WotC had to shrink, and everyone had to share the pain, so the RPGA lost fairly significant budget dollars this year, and we reduced our staff headcount in December. As a result, we've been a bit more chaotic than usual around the office, and things are taking a bit longer than we'd like to get done, but we're adjusting. Furthermore, we had already begun to plan for ways to become more efficient and less expensive to run, and we're going to continue in that direction. For the short term, we're concentrating our resources on our primary Network—in North America and the UK, where about 95% of the membership resides—and we're putting aside some of the growth initiatives we had in mind until we can realize our efficiencies and/or secure more budget dollars.

Such are the normal fluctuations in business, and we have to ride them out. When times are good, we take advantage of every possible opportunity to grow the Network and expand its offerings. When times are lean, we regroup, hold our ground, solidify our base operations, and we tell our members where things stand. Keith Strohm, the head of the WotC RPG business, believes we will shatter our 2001 revenue forecasts within the first six months, and if that happens, he will request additional budget dollars, to restore funding to the RPGA and other parts of the business. However, we continue to act as if the budget that was approved is the budget we'll have for the whole year, which is the only responsible thing to do.

Fortunately, the total RPGA budget still exceeds $1 million (although we were hoping for almost twice that this year), and every dime we make goes right back into the Network. I'd like to take a moment to point out that the RPGA is not a profitable operation, and it never was: Each GUILD-LEVEL™ membership costs the RPGA about $85 to fulfill, which is more than four times the going rate for dues. WotC continues to fund the RPGA for the reasons I outlined above, and the company is happy to do so, but it's important to understand that there couldn't be an RPGA unless WotC was more than willing to support it.

On the other hand, we're looking for ways to make the RPGA profitable for the first time, without resorting to charging $85 a year for membership. (No way!) For example, we're thinking about adding premium services, which we hope members would be willing to pay for beyond their standard benefits, and which would attract many more members with the same sentiments. At the same time, we continue to seek ways to make existing services less expensive. (Using the Internet more and more, instead of paper communications, and using databases instead of scoring manually, are a few examples of what we're after here.) There also are a few ideas that we're kicking around, which are fairly radical by traditional business standards. Due to the sensitivity of some ongoing negotiations, I can't yet go into detail about this, but I recently have made a proposal to WotC that represents a fundamental shift in how the RPGA will operate, and I am currently negotiating with key executives on it. I hope to have some interesting news to report within the next couple issues of *Polyhedron*.

Before moving on to my "state of the Network" remarks, allow me to define the new and current division of responsibilities among the RPGA staff:

Robert Wiese (HQ Manager, aka "Number One"): Operations management, large-convention organization, website development, database development, member services.
Scott Magner (HQ Games Coordinator): Campaign development and oversight, scenario procurement and quality control, member services.
Erik Mona (Global Publications Coordinator): Publications, member services.
Stephen Radney-MacFarland (Editorial Assistant): Editorial assistance, member services.
Ian Richards (UK Manager):

UK operations, European member services.

Sean Connor (UK Assistant Manager, UK Games Coordinator): UK operations, European member services, and shared responsibility for campaign development (with Scott Magner).

Ann Van Dam and Wes Nicholson: Able assistance in Continental Europe and the APAC region, respectively, and of course member services.

David Wise (Worldwide Manager, aka "The Big Cheesehead"): Global Network management, business planning, interdepartmental management, program development, member services, hare-brained schemes.

STATE OF THE NETWORK LAST YEAR

· We doubled Guild membership, to the largest ever. There are more than 13,000 GUILD-LEVEL members, and more that 76,000 members in the overall Network (including FELLOWSHIP-LEVEL™ members)—tripling last year's figures!

· As mentioned, the RPGA became part of core WotC RPG business strategy.

· We had the largest GEN CON® Game Fair ever, with the largest level of RPGA gaming.

· We launched the LIVING GREYHAWK™ campaign, the largest and most significant campaign since Living City, launched in 1987.

· We doubled the page count of the new, global *Polyhedron* to 64 pages, and went to full-color. Meanwhile, we launched the *Living Greyhawk Journal*, a 32-page magazine which also is full color.

· We became the official playtesting body of the Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying Games Division.

· We reunified with our RPGA UK branch, and established communications with previously neglected members all over the world.

· We suffered budget cuts/headcount reductions, as the Pokémon boom slowed.

STATE OF THE NETWORK THIS YEAR

It's our 20th Anniversary! We celebrated with some munchies and cake at WINTER FANTASY™, not to mention a weekend of heavy-duty roleplaying.

We launched the new Star Wars LIVING FORCE™ campaign! Special thanks to Jae Walker, Morrie Mullins, and their legions of volunteers who made it happen. The campaign is a huge hit!

We formally converted the LIVING CITY campaign (Ravens Bluff) to Third Edition D&D rules. This was not an easy or pleasant task, and I want to express my deep appreciation to Troy Daniels for accepting this thankless job and getting it done. WotC RPG management felt it critical to move to the new D&D rules immediately, and mandated the change by WINTER FANTASY. There remain issues to clear up, but the conversion is done, and we can all move on to the new campaign. Whew!

As an aside, I wish to honor and thank Brooks Banks, Gail Reese, and Cindy Mullins for their years of service on the LC Board. They have carried a heavy load with distinction.

We've seen increased RPGA web content and activity. This is something we look forward to much more of.

Last year was our "Year of Strategic Repositioning." This year will be our "Year of Operational Excellence." Our goal is to make the Network run more smoothly, respond to member needs more quickly, and add more functionality to our online services.

Many of you know that we reinstated the $10 ordering fee per scenario from our library. This is a temporary measure, implemented to stop rampant abuse of the privilege. Furthermore, members were ordering scenarios faster than we could produce them, so we invoked a fee just to slow it down a little. I am working on an alternative fee structure that is modest and user-based, meaning that heavy users will pay a little more and light users will pay less. Stay tuned for more details.

I am working on a new program that makes use of the valuable skills and enthusiasm of our Regional Directors, while making RPGA Clubs more central to our operations. Again, stand by for more details.

I am thinking about a GM-cultivation Program. We need more GMs in the hobby, we want to help existing GMs improve their skills, and we want to honor GMs for all they do. Any ideas? Let me know!

We are working on a program that will support member-driven campaigns. In other words, if any group of members wants to run a small-scale "LIVING™ campaign," we want to offer them support. Once again, stay tuned for details.

After considerable deliberation, we've decided to handle the annual member adventure in a different format. We're going to produce a special "flip book" issue of *Polyhedron*, late in the year—flip your *Poly* over and you'll see the cover of the adventure. We made this deci-

sion for several reasons: First, the annual adventure cost a ton of money to produce, but it's one of the less-prized benefits of membership. (We want to spend member dues on the things most members want.) Second, the new adventure will be full color throughout, rather than black and white inside, which is sweet. Third, we thought it would make for a pretty special and cool issue of *Poly*. Fourth, the old annual adventure always had to fight for a place on the production schedule, amidst the many for-sale products that WotC designs, which is why *Fright at Tristor* took so long to finally reach you; the new format will be produced as part of the regular *Polyhedron* schedule.

Here's my least favorite part of the speech: As of March 5, 2001, the annual dues for RPGA membership will rise (see Network News for more details on this development).

This is the first time we've raised the cost of dues since 1993, and believe me we didn't really want to do it, but the budget constrictions forced our hand. The good news is that you can renew at the old prices until then, and that includes the three-year rates. (Sorry, no extensions beyond three years.)

I've discussed this rise in rates with numerous members, and virtually none of them have been surprised by it, given the recent improvements in benefits and the addition of the LIVING GREYHAWK and LIVING FORCE campaigns. However, here's some more information to put it all in perspective: In 1981, when the RPGA was first established, membership cost $10, for which you would have received a membership card, a pin, and a welcome letter—period. Adjusted for inflation, that's $23 today, which is three dollars more than the current cost. You could also add a discounted subscription to DRAGON® *Magazine* to your membership in 1981, in which case the cost was $30. Considering what you get for your membership today, the RPGA has to be one of the best deals going. (spin, spin, spin . . .)

STATE OF THE NETWORK NEXT YEAR

We intend to continue to increase our Internet presence and functionality. We'll never replace the tabletop game, but all the data management surrounding it will someday be Internet-based. (Don't worry—that won't happen for a while!)

Speaking of data management, we intend to increase the amount of data we manage, and the ways in which it can be used by members.

We intend to return to our master plan of global expansion until every gamer on the planet can join the RPGA and enjoy its full benefits.

THINGS I WANT TO DO NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

(although I can't make any promises)

- I want to restore the GUILD-LEVEL member benefit of RPG product discounts.
- I want to see certs and scoring incorporated into every D&D adventure, and RPG products made by other companies too.
- I want to implement a campus program, bringing the RPGA and D&D to colleges everywhere.
- I want to continue to shorten response time to member inquiries until it's near-instantaneous.
- I want to continue to "get the bugs out" of everything we do.
- I want to constantly add additional value to the basic benefits package without adding additional costs.

In conclusion, in spite of the various "bad news" to report, the RPGA is far from failing; in fact, it's better off than ever from a business point of view. In past years, when the business got into trouble, the RPGA tended to sort of disappear altogether. (If it weren't for Robert Wiese, the RPGA would have disappeared forever in 1996!) Every setback for the TSR/WotC business was a major setback for the RPGA. However, this year, the RPGA has been codified as central to the RPG business, and we're far from going anywhere near oblivion.

The RPGA is 20 years old, but in many crucial ways, it's brand new. Not only are we now central to the WotC RPG business strategy, but we produce professional, full-color magazines, we've introduced the LIVING GREYHAWK and LIVING FORCE campaigns (as well as all the other great campaigns you like to play), we're the official playtesting body of WotC RPG R&D, we've attained international unity and growth, and more. Best of all, we're moving closer to being an international community of fellow gamers. RPGs are all about friends, and in the RPGA you have friends all over the world.

As we proceed from here, I want you to know that my staff and I are here "for the members," as we intone at the end of every weekly meeting. I didn't just apply for my job, I created it and stepped into it because I understood how cool the RPGA is, and how much cooler it can be. Similarly, the whole staff gives more of its time and energy and love to the Network than probably is good for them, but they don't regret it (or at least they haven't told me so!). The bad news is we're not perfect, and we have lots of improvements to make; the good news is we still have lots more energy and a real will to make the RPGA better every day.

Thanks for listening, always feel free to write me at wiseguy@wizards.com, and let the games continue!

The Magic of Ravens Bluff

BY SEVERAL LIVING CITY™ SCENARIO AUTHORS

The following several dozen items come from the RPGA's vast database of magical items appearing in nearly 500 LIVING CITY—Ravens Bluff scenarios over the past decade. Presented here in fully compliant DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® terms for use in your home campaigning, these items were chosen by a small committee of volunteers and editors as the crème of the crop—the most interesting of an already unique, vibrant collection of magic. Astute players will note that the items below differ slightly from their "in-play" versions found on official campaign certificates. Players should stick with what's on their certificates for scenario play—the following descriptions are geared for home play, and should not be considered official LIVING CITY re-interpretations. Having said that... enjoy!

ARMOR AND SHIELDS

Arvoreen's Shield of the Protector: The front of this iron-banded *+1 small wooden shield* is emblazoned with the gold-inlaid symbol of the halfling god Arvoreen the Protector. This shield has a spell-like ability that allows the wielder to absorb damage done to a comrade. Once per day the wielder can protect an ally as per a *shield other* spell cast as a 10th-level cleric.

Caster Level: 10th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *shield other*; *Market Price:* 18,576 gp; *Weight:* 5 lb.

Dragon Shield of Protection: This *+3 large steel shield* is reinforced with the scales of a blue dragon. Small runes on the shield's face and along the inside of its rim spell out the word "dragon" in such a way that all who view it see the word written in their native language. Whenever a dragon comes within 30 feet of the shield these runes glow softly for one round. If the shield's bearer speaks the word "dragon," the shield begins to glow as per the *daylight* spell cast by a 5th-level sorcerer. While the shield shines, the bearer makes saves against a dragon's breath weapons as if he or she had the Evasion class ability (see rogue or monk).

In my far-ranging travels across the girth of Faerûn, I've come across many locales that claimed to have had some proprietary hold on "the best" adventurers and magical artifice. Few cities have had so many facts to back up this type of claim as Ravens Bluff, in the Vast. In the past few years, the region has seen a major war against a mysterious warlord and her savage humanoid forces, the emergence and subsequent destruction of no fewer than two major artifacts (the malignant Heart of Bane and the beatific Orb of Protection), and, if reports are to be believed, the appearance of an avatar of Sune Firehair herself!

Here, unlicensed bands of danger seekers roam the streets, nearly outnumbering honest folk, always puffing themselves up with pretension and armories of magical devices and weapons. Why, a stranger walking the streets of the City of Ravens might think himself in distant Halruaa after seeing the adventuring class floating by on flying carpets or settling arguments in the street with fireballs and magical blades. The chaos seemingly engendered by such proliferation of adventurers and magic is at times bewildering and frightening. To a scholar such as myself, trained for more than a decade by reading the tales of great heroes and the fantastic magics that accompanied them, it is wholly enticing.

What follows is merely a glimpse at some of the more intriguing items used and abused by the citizens and enemies of Ravens Bluff, the most alluringly dangerous metropolis in all the Vast!

— Erron of Candlekeep

Further, the shield aids the bearer in resisting the attacks of dragons, granting a +2 insight bonus to armor class against all dragon melee attacks (i.e. bite, claw, wing, and tail slap) as well as grapple, crush or snatch attacks, and a +3 insight bonus to all saving throws against spells cast by dragons.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *daylight*; *Market Price:* 42,070 gp; *Weight:* 15 lb.

Half-Plate of the Moon: This suit of dark purple +2 *half-plate* allows the wearer to cast a *moonbeam* spell (see the FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting) as a 3rd-level cleric, once per day. Lycanthropes in humanoid form caught in the cone must make a Will save (DC 13) to avoid involuntarily assuming their animal forms.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *moonbeam*; *Market Price:* 8,350 gp; *Weight:* 50 lb.

WEAPONS

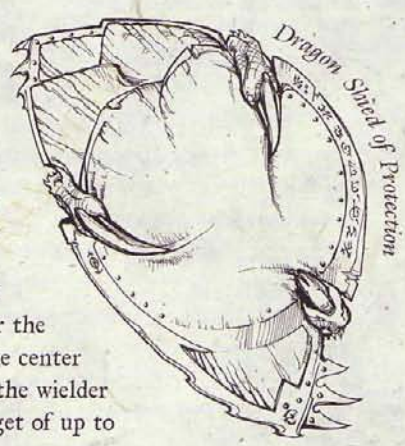
Bracer Blade: This single magical ivory bracer is decorated with a highly stylized knotwork pattern surrounding the personal symbol of Anton D'Magus, a fallen paladin who has caused much grief in the area surrounding the city of Ravens Bluff. As a free action, its wearer may trigger the bracer's magic, creating a shimmering blue blade of force that juts out from the upper portion of the bracer and acts as a +2 *brilliant energy short sword* (anyone proficient with a short sword is also proficient with a *bracer blade*). Upon the utterance of a command word, the blade withdraws into the bracer. The bracer blade takes up the entire bracer/bracelet magical item slot; it cannot be worn with any other magical bracer or bracelet.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *open/close*; *Market Price:* 54,000 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Crysmal Sword: These steel-hard crystalline blades, highly treasured by bards and performers, first appeared in the Vast during the last decade. Since then, they have become something of a badge of honor for those who live by performance and song, not to mention a modicum of swordplay. Both long- and short sword varieties have been seen.

When wielded by a bard with 9 or more ranks in Perform, the sword reveals a host of special powers (as if cast by a 10th-level bard). As a free action, such a wielder may cause the sword to shed *light*. When drawn, the sword begins to softly hum a musical tune. In combat, the song becomes louder and clearer. Though the wielder can be magically silenced, no spell can quiet the crysmal blade.

As a standard action, the wielder may channel one of his or her bardic music uses into the sword by singing a high C (Perform (singing) check, DC 15), which causes the blade to issue forth a sonic blast equal to a *shatter* spell cast by a 10th-level bard (either the sword itself acts as the center of the spell's area or the wielder chooses a specific target of up to 100 pounds).



The wielder can, as a standard action, use three of his or her bardic music uses to sing a scale ending in a high C (Perform (singing) check, DC 15), which causes the blade to issue forth a tremendous brilliant flash of energy. Everyone within 50 feet (except the wielder) must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 12) or be blinded for 1d6 rounds.

Caster Level: 10th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *blindness/deafness*, *shatter*; *Market Price:* 53,100 gp; *Weight:* 3 lb.

Dagger of Clan Shado: This fine +1 *dagger* bears a double-edged blade of dark blue steel, with the coat of arms of Clan Shado (a well-known merchant/adventuring house in the City of Ravens) inlaid in gold on one side. The hilt is of ebony, with a delicate tracery of gold wire to provide a solid, comfortable grip. A small golden ball set at the end of a smooth pommel provides counterbalance to the blade. The dagger has been enchanted to be exceptionally durable, to never rust and to never need sharpening. Each dagger has a number engraved in the tang (which can be checked by unscrewing the pommel). More than 100 such blades were given as gifts to all attendees of the wedding of Kima Greyleaf, Clan Shado's Leader for Life, and Jean-Dorial Encarthan, an elven warrior of no small repute.

It is said that Clan Shado's ominous tower in the Temple District holds a record of each wedding guest and his associated dagger, and that the leaders of the organization magically track whether or not the guests have sold or traded the weapons. Those who do so find themselves in ill odor with the organization.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor; *Market Price:* 2,302 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Deathstryke, +2 Holy Bastard Sword: When unsheathed, the +2 *holy bastard sword* known as *Deathstryke* hums and glows with a soft green light. The weapon's hum cannot be silenced by any means.

Specifically created to be used by beings of good

alignment, it lets loose with a blood-curdling scream if wielded by a neutral or evil creature, and bestows one negative level upon such wielders. The negative level remains so long as the weapon is in hand. *Deathstryke* is a neutral good intelligent weapon with an Ego of 6, Intelligence 12, Wisdom 10, and Charisma 11. It communicates semi-empathetically.

Once per day, the wielder may use *Deathstryke* to cast *true strike* upon himself. Until the attack is made, the wielder hears the work "strike!" repeated over and over in his or her head.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *true strike*; *Market Price:* 38,135 gp; *Weight:* 10 lb.

Mace of the Positive Material Plane: This *+2 silvered heavy mace* constantly glows with a bright luminescence, as if a *continual flame* had been cast upon it. The mace bears the bane vs. undead special ability.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *continual flame*; *Market Price:* 32,420 gp; *Weight:* 12 lb.

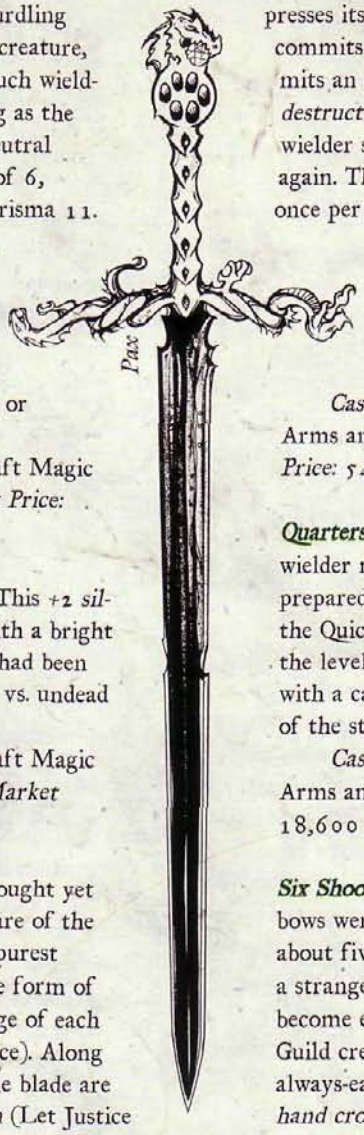
Pax: This longsword is a massively wrought yet gracious weapon. The blade and tang are of the blackest adamantine and the hilt the purest mithril. The quillons are shaped in the form of coiled gold dragons. Along the left edge of each face of the blade is the rune, *Pax* (Peace). Along the right-hand edge of each face of the blade are the runes *Fait Justitina, Ruat, Caelum* (Let Justice Be Done, Though the Heavens Should Fall). The pommel is capped by a large blue star sapphire held in the jaws of a mighty platinum dragon. Six hollow indentations mark spots where similarly sized gems might once have been placed, though these have been lost (rumors suggest that the blade will gain great powers if all six lost stones are recovered).

In the hands of a paladin, *Pax* gains additional powers, becoming a *+3 holy longsword.*

A paladin may use *Pax* to cast daylight as a 15th-level cleric once per day.

Pax is a lawful good intelligent weapon with the following characteristics: Int: 10, Wis: 18, Cha: 15, Ego: 17. It communicates empathically. It has a hardness of 23 and 14 hit points.

Pax will not allow itself to be used unjustly. It will issue a stern empathic warning to the wielder in such a case. If unjust actions persist, it suppresses its magical powers for one day. If the wielder commits five such transgressions, or willingly commits an evil act, *Pax* unleashes a powerful enlarged *destruction* spell against him (DC 21). Should the wielder survive, *Pax* will never function for him again. The sword may cast destruction in this way once per day.



Should the wielder lose his paladin abilities temporarily, Pax suppresses all magical abilities until a new wielder is found or until the paladin redeems himself.

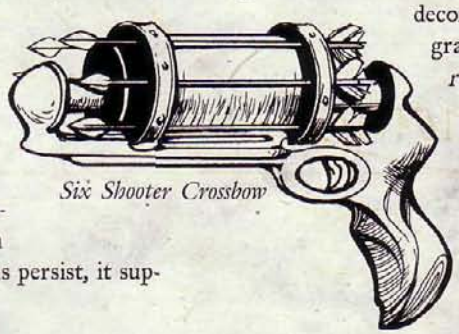
Caster Level: 15th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *daylight*, *destruction*; *Market Price:* 54,015 gp; *Weight:* 4 lb.

Quarterstaff of Rapid Magery: Once per day, the wielder may employ this *+2 quarterstaff* to cast a prepared arcane spell as if it were prepared using the Quicken meta-magic feat. This does not change the level of the spell, and only functions for spells with a casting time of 1 action or less. Both ends of the staff bear +2 enhancement bonuses.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *continual flame*; *Market Price:* 18,600 gp; *Weight:* 4 lb.

Six Shooter Crossbow: These unusual hand crossbows were first brought to the City of Ravens about five years ago by adventurers returning from a strange, off-world quest. Since then, they have become enormously popular, with the Wizards Guild creating dozens every year, mostly for the always-eager adventuring class. Essentially a *+1 hand crossbow*, a six shooter allows up to six crossbow bolts to be fired before reloading, a process equal to a move-equivalent action. While it holds bolts, the wielder can fire according to her normal number of attacks. Unlike a crossbow, the six shooters have no drawstring—bolts are propelled forward by magical force. Six shooters are exotic weapons that may be wielded with no penalty by those with proficiency with hand crossbows. They likewise share the hand crossbow's range increment.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor; *Market Price:* 3,650 gp; *Weight:* 4 lb.



Six Shooter Crossbow

Storm Reaver: The blade of this *+3 shock longsword* is decorated in a lightning motif. When drawn, it grants the wielder lightning resistance, per the *resist elements* spell. Storm Reaver is itself completely immune to damage from electricity. The sword may be employed to cast *lightning bolt* as a 7th-level sorcerer (Reflex save, DC 14, for half damage). When this power is used, one of seven lightning sigils on the blade fades from

existence. When no sigils remain, the blade loses all powers save its enhancement bonus.

Caster Level: 7th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *lightning bolt, resist elements*; *Market Price:* 71,665 gp; *Weight:* 4 lb.

Viper's Brood Dagger: In melee combat, the *viper's brood* acts as a *+1 dagger*. Immediately after a damaging ranged attack or missed throw, however, it changes shape into that of a tiny snake, which crawls back to its owner at a speed of 15 ft. The snake cannot attack, and in fact is not truly alive, being little more than an animated object. If the owner is at any time farther than 50 ft. from the snake-form, the dagger stops crawling and reverts to dagger form.

Caster Level: 11th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *animate objects*; *Market Price:* 11,302 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

RINGS

Moon Ring of Selûne: This *+2 ring of protection* was created by the priests of Ravens Bluff's temple of Selûne. Its golden band is topped by a moonstone-inset face carved to resemble a waxing moon. Once per night (and only at night), the wearer may cast *dancing lights, faerie fire,* and *moonbeam* (see the FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Guide) as a 12th-level cleric.

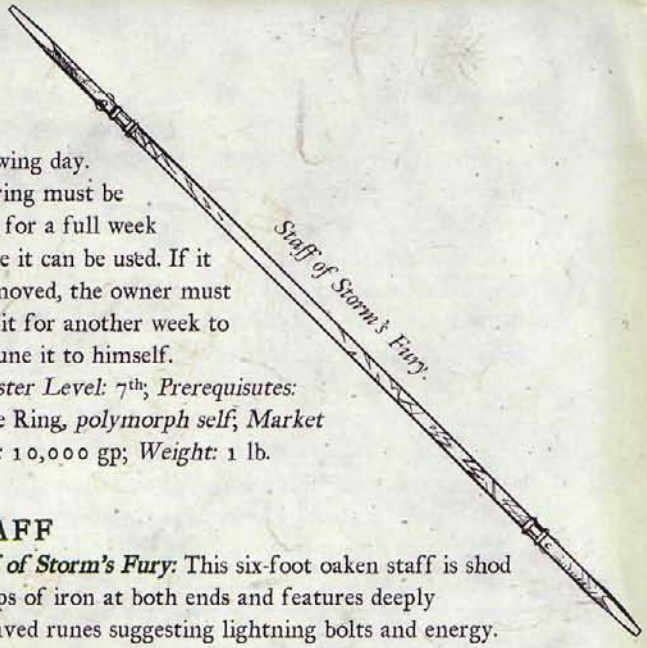
Caster Level: 12th; *Prerequisites:* Forge Ring, *dancing lights, faerie fire, moonbeam*; *Market Price:* 16,400 gp; *Weight:* 4 lb.

Ring of Last Request: When slain, this ring's wearer may immediately send a single telepathic message of up to 25 words to 10 individuals anywhere on the same plane as the wearer's body. The ring must be worn at the moment of death in order for the item to function. The ring works twice, then crumbles to dust.

Caster Level: 9th; *Prerequisites:* Forge Ring, *Rary's telepathic bond*; *Market Price:* 1,800 gp; *Weight:* 4 lb.

Ring of the Rat: These once rather common rings, symbols of membership for a Crow's End street gang called the Righteous Vermin, have become quite rare in the three years since the Vermin were wiped out by a rival gang, the Black Talons. Once per day, the wearer may twist the ring to *polymorph* himself into a rat (see *Monster Manual*, p. 201) for up to 7 hours. He may re-assume his normal shape at will, but cannot thereafter "change back" into rat form until the following day. The ring must be worn for a full week before it can be used. If it is removed, the owner must wear it for another week to reattune it to himself.

Caster Level: 7th; *Prerequisites:* Forge Ring, *polymorph self*; *Market Price:* 10,000 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.



STAFF

Staff of Storm's Fury: This six-foot oaken staff is shod in caps of iron at both ends and features deeply engraved runes suggesting lightning bolts and energy. It allows the use of the following spells:

- *Shocking grasp* (1 charge, DC 12)
- *Glyph of warding* (2 charges, always an electricity blast glyph), DC 14)
- *Lightning bolt* (8d6, DC 14) (2 charges)

Caster Level: 8th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Staff, *glyph of warding, lightning bolt, shocking grasp*; *Market Price:* 18,750 gp; *Weight:* 5 lb.

WONDROUS ITEMS

Amulet of Life Protection: The wearer of this amulet is protected from the *magic jar* spell, a ghost's malevolence special attack, or any other attack that attempts to displace the user's soul from her body. Even upon death (i.e., the user is brought to −10 hit points), the amulet attempts to protect the user's soul by storing it within the amulet. Resisting the pull to the Fugue Plane, the soul will reside within the amulet for one day (24 hours) before passing on. If the body is fully healed and restored (i.e., brought to maximum hit points and maximum Constitution) before a day has passed, the amulet places the soul back into its natural corporeal host as if *resurrected.* If the wearer has been turned into an undead creature or killed by a death effect, the soul will not return to the body even if the body is fully healed and restored. The amulet has no effect if worn by constructs, elementals, outsiders or undead creatures. Wearing the amulet of life protection does not obviate any level loss associated with coming back from the dead.

Caster Level: 15th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *magic jar*; *Market Price:* 124,000 gp; *Weight:* —.

Amulet of Neutrality: In the chambers of the High Court in Ravens Bluff's City Hall, few names cross spiteful lips more often than that of Venellus Megs, a notorious enchanter who for years lived in seclusion in Crow's End, creating magical items for use by the city's least lawful inhabitants. Perhaps most vexing of these enchantments (the creation of which, it is said, directly resulted in Megs being imprisoned on Illwater) is the *amulet of neutrality*, a plain ceramic disk (marked with Megs' personal sigil) that renders the wearer immune to *detect thoughts, discern lies,* and any attempt to discern her alignment. Further, for the purposes of spell effects, the wearer's alignment is considered neutral (for instance, *protection from evil* would offer no protections against attacks made by an *amulet of neutrality* wearer).

Caster Level: 8th; *Prerequisites:* Forge Ring, *nondetection*; *Market Price:* 48,000 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Amulet of the Silver Dragon: This *+1 amulet of natural armor* signifies the wearer as a friend to good dragons, granting her a +4 circumstance bonus to Charisma checks when trying to influence a good dragon's attitude (see *Dungeon Master's Guide,* p. 149). Additionally, the amulet grants a +4 competence bonus to saves made against the breath weapon attacks of evil dragons.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *barkskin, suggestion*; *Market Price:* 4,320 gp; *Weight:* —.

Ash of Envisioning: This fine gray ash allows the user to telepathically experience the last 1d4 rounds of a deceased person's conscious memories. The user draws an eye on the deceased's forehead using the ash. The victim must have died within the last 24 hours, have an intelligence of at least 2, and the brain must be intact. This is a single-use item.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *speak with dead*; *Market Price:* 750 gp; *Weight:* 3 lb.

Bag of Monkeys: This small burlap sack may be thrown as an exotic grenade-like weapon (10 ft. range increment, 1d2 direct hit damage) Upon impact, the bag explodes into a swirl of magical energy that instantly manifests into a swarm of chattering, tiny monkeys constructed purely of arcane energy. These monkeys move at a Speed of 40 feet toward the closest creature, and, as a standard action, crawl all over him, disrupting his actions in the process. The shenanigans of these monkeys cause a —2 circumstance penalty to all attacks and skill checks that are affected by armor check penalties. As well, spellcasters attempting to cast spells while serving as the monkey's jungle gym must make a successful Concentration check (DC 15) or fail in the casting and lose the spell. These strange monkeys are more magical force than physical beings, and as such cannot be attacked by normal means, but may be dispelled. The monkeys disappear 7 rounds after the bag explodes. The bag is destroyed when it explodes.

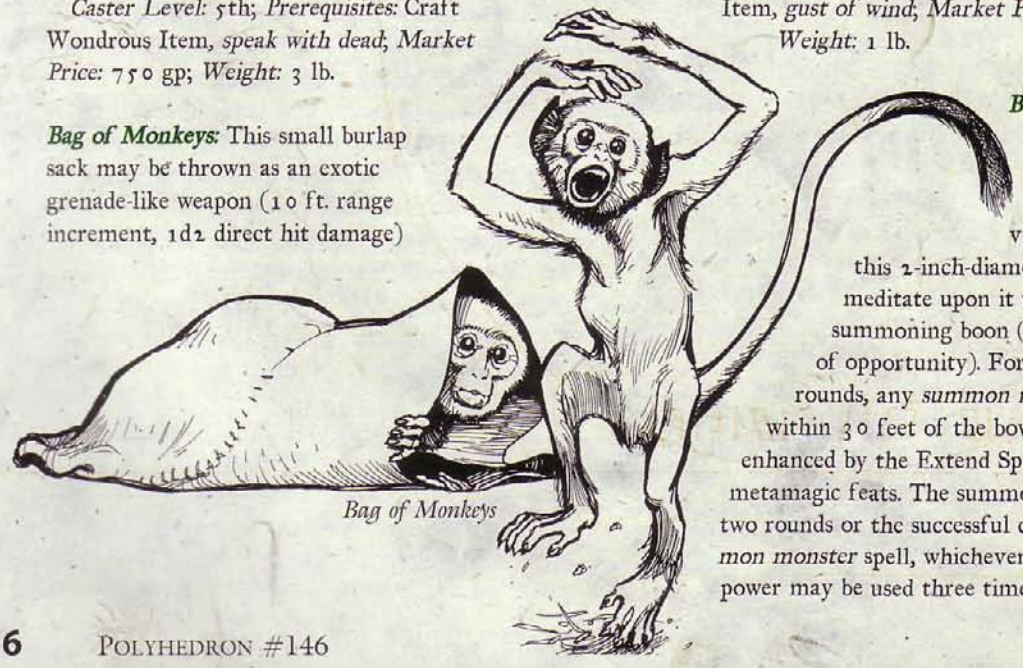
Caster Level: 3rd; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *summon swarm*; *Market Price:* 300 gp; *Weight:* 3 lb.

Beholder Pendant: The central eye of this small beholder-shaped golden pendant is inset with a large ruby, and its diamond-tipped eyestalks writhe like those of a true beholder. Whenever within 600 ft. of such a creature, the central eye pulses with dim light. The pendant confers a +2 luck bonus to all saves made against any eyestalk attack mad by a beholder.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *detect evil, displacement, locate creature*; *Market Price:* 3,750 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Boots of the Windrider: The *boots of the windrider* allow the wearer to ignore any strong or lower wind effects (see *Dungeon Master's Guide,* p. 87), including the effects of a *gust of wind* spell. However, they confer no protection against more powerful winds.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *gust of wind*; *Market Price:* 5,000 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.



Bag of Monkeys

Bowl of Monster Summoning: As a full-round action, the user may pour a vial of holy water into this 2-inch-diameter ceramic bowl and meditate upon it to unleash a powerful summoning boon (this provokes attacks of opportunity). For the following two rounds, any *summon monster* spell cast within 30 feet of the bowl is cast as if enhanced by the Extend Spell and Enlarge Spell metamagic feats. The summoning boon ends after two rounds or the successful casting of one *summon monster* spell, whichever comes first. This power may be used three times per day.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *monster summoning I*, Extend Spell, Enlarge Spell; *Market Price:* 24,000 gp; *Weight:* 2 lb.

Candle of Exploding: Once lit, this candle quickly burns for one round. On the round after it is lit, the candle explodes as a *fireball* cast by a 6th-level wizard.

Caster Level: 6th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *fireball*; *Market Price:* 900 gp; *Weight:* —.

Cloak of Starlight: This shiny black cloak appears to absorb nearby light. When not in daylight, the cloak reveals tiny sparkles on its surface. When worn under starlight, the cloak confers lowlight vision upon the wearer. When underground and in complete darkness, the cloak confers darkvision. Furthermore, when worn underground the wearer gains a +6 circumstance bonus to Hide checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *darkvision, cat's grace*; *Market Price:* 13,000 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Cones of Communication: This pair of wooden cones, thought to have been crafted in the early days of Ravens Bluff by architects and masons working on the city's complicated walls, allows communication across a distance of up to 100 miles. Anyone speaking into one cone can clearly be heard through the second device.

Caster Level: 10th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *message*; *Market Price:* 27,000 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Dirty Turtle: This grubby sealed turtle shell is a symbol of one of Ravens Bluff's most disreputable and disrespected street gangs, who derive their oft-mocked name from it. The dirty turtle's shell cracks upon impact, releasing a foul combination of soiled earth, malodorous herbs, and pungent magics (treat as a *stinking cloud* centered upon the point of impact). The resulting cloud of nauseating miasma remains for 5 rounds.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisutes:* Craft Wondrous Item, *stinking cloud*; *Market Price:* 500 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Earring of Dark Fire: This dangling black onyx earring does not detect as magical until pierced through an earlobe. Once put in place, the wearer immediately realizes the earring's true power. Once per day the wearer has the ability to cast *produce flame* as a 6th-level druid. The flames produced generate heat like a normal fire, but do not produce light. The flames appear as dancing black shadows. In addition, the wearer takes on the illusion (dispelled as a *silent image* cast by a 10th-level sorcerer) of a hideous fiend while the fire effect is activated.

Caster Level: 10th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *produce flame, silent image*; *Market Price:* 13,620; *Weight:* —.

Eldath's Origami Peace Crane: Once per day the wielder of *Eldath's origami peace crane* may open this white paper figure by gently pulling down on the wings. Instantly, a visible white aura covers a 60-feet radius emanating from the item. All within the radius must make a Will save (DC 19) or fall under the effects of a *calm emotion* spell cast by a 20th-level cleric. This effect does not require concentration to maintain for the duration of the effect (20 rounds).

The peace crane can be only be activated by those who revere Eldath as their patron deity.

Caster Level: 20th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *calm emotionse*; *Market Price:* 14,400; *Weight:* —.

Flagon of Flowing Ale: This flagon can produce a gallon of excellent ale once per day. This item is considered priceless by many dwarves.

Caster Level: 6th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *create food and water*; *Market Price:* 6,480; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Gauntlets of Heat: These mithril gauntlets produce a trio of spell-like abilities that generate heat and fire. Once per day the wielder can cast *heat metal, produce flame* (as a 6th-level druid) and *burning hands* (as a 6th-level sorcerer).

Caster Level: 6th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *heat metal, produce flame, burning hands*; *Market Price:* 12,000 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Gloves of Entropy: When donned, these deep black silken gloves cause the wearer's hands to phase out of existence, replacing them with similarly shaped shadow-stuff. The wearer cannot hold anything while wearing the gloves, and loses the effects of any rings worn. However, thanks to the dark power of the gloves, she

can strike with a dangerous touch attack. Those so touched must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 23) or gain 1d4 negative levels. If the victim has at least as many negative levels as HD, he dies. Each negative level gives a creature the following penalties: -1 competence penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, ability checks, and effective level. Additionally, a spellcaster loses one spell or slot from her highest available level. Negative levels stack.

Each time the gloves are worn, they siphon 500 xp from the wearer. The wearer loses 1d4 points of temporary Wisdom for every round after the eighth consecutive round in which the mind-warping gloves are worn.

Assuming the victim survives, he regains lost levels after 12 hours. Negatives levels gained in this way don't last long enough to permanently drain the victim's levels.

Both gloves must be worn, or neither functions. The wearer may devote her full concentration on manifesting enough of her hands from netherspace to remove the gloves (as a full-round action that provokes attacks of opportunity). They cannot be removed in any other way.

Caster Level: 12th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *enervation*; *Market Price:* 64,000 gp; *Weight:* —.

Graz'zt's Six-Fingered Pendant: Some half-dozen of these pendants were discovered among the belongings of captured mercenary generals allied with the warlord Myrkyssa Jelan during the war that recently troubled the Vast. A three-inch tall six-fingered tin hand attached to a fine steel cord, the pendant is a symbol of the Abyssal Lord Graz'zt, a powerful enemy of the city. Once every seven days, the wearer may grasp the hand in a special way to summon an 8 HD vrock. If the summoner is not evil, she is attacked by the vrock. Otherwise, she may command it for up to 17 rounds (after which it returns to the Abyss) or until it is killed, whichever comes first.

Caster Level: 17th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster IX*; *Market Price:* 12,000 gp; *Weight:* —.

Ioun Stone, Fiery Red Rhomboid: As long as this ioun stone circles above the user's head, it grants her to *endure elements (fire)*.

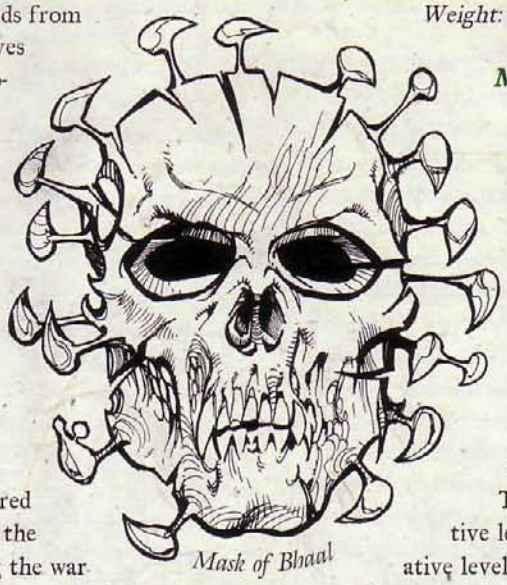
Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *endure elements*; *Market Price:* 10,000 gp; *Weight:* —.

Key of Translation: This golden key amulet is attached to a thick gold chain. When worn around the neck, it grants the wearer the spell-like ability *comprehend languages* as cast by a 5th-level sorcerer. This power can be activated once per day.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *comprehend languages*; *Market Price:* 2,000 gp; *Weight:* —.

Lathander's Deathspeak Stone: Speaking Lathander's name and passing this flat, rosy-hued stone over the head of a corpse allows the user to speak with dead as a 5th-level cleric. The magic may be used once, after which the stone turns smoky gray and becomes non-magical.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *speak with dead*; *Market Price:* 750 gp; *Weight:* 2 lb.



Mask of Bhaal

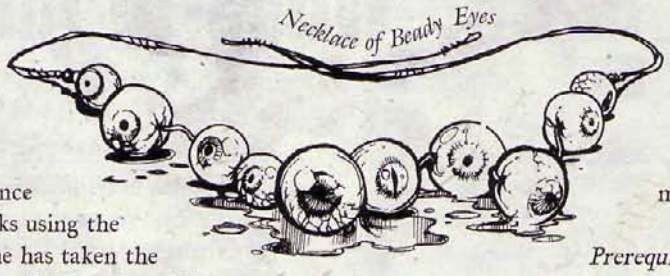
Mask of Bhaal: This elaborately carved wooden mask instills a feeling of horror upon all who behold its fearsome countenance. The mask functions as a fear gaze attack (DC 15), with a range of 30 ft. The wearer can activate this power once per day. This power lasts 10 rounds, during which it cannot be "turned off" (see gaze attacks, *Dungeons Master Guide*, p. 77) and the mask cannot be taken off. The *mask of Bhaal* bestows one negative level upon non-evil wearers. The negative level persists as long as the mask is worn and disappears when the mask is removed. The negative level never results in actual level loss, but it cannot be overcome in any way (including *restoration* spells) while the mask is worn.

Caster Level: 14th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *fear, eyebite*; *Market Price:* 39,200 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Necklace of Beady Eyes: This necklace features ten realistic-looking eyeballs strung on a thin strip of leather. When pulled from the necklace, each eye becomes an *arcane eye* as if cast by an 8th-level sorcerer. The wearer controls and sees through the eyes as if they were the arcane spell-caster who cast the *arcane eye* spell.

Caster Level: 8th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *arcane eye*; *Market Price:* 16,000 gp;

Weight: 2 lb.



Obsidian War Eagle Pendant: This pendant grants the wearer a +1 competence bonus to melee attacks using the weapon with which he has taken the Weapon Specialization fighter class ability.

If worn within the area of an *Eldath's origami peace crane's calm emotion* effect, the *obsidian war eagle pendant* animates and attacks the crane with frightening speed—destroying both items in one round.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *magic weapon*; *Market Price:* 10,000 gp; *Weight:* —.

Powder of Stone to Flesh: This powder, when sprinkled over something made of stone, changes the stone into a flesh form as per *stone to flesh* cast by an 11th-level wizard.

Caster Level: 11th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *stone to flesh*; *Market Price:* 3,000; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Shifter Manacles: Any creature constrained by these masterwork manacles falls under the effect of a continual *dimensional anchor* spell, as cast by a 7th-level wizard.

Caster Level: 7th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *dimensional anchor*; *Market Price:* 56,050 gp; *Weight:* 2 lb.

Skull Mask: When worn, this skull-shaped mask transforms the wearer's visage to appear as an actual skull. The wearer gains a +4 morale bonus to saving throws against disease, fear, and paralysis effects. Once per day, the wearer may activate the spell-like ability *deathwatch* as an 8th-level cleric. The skull mask further provides some protection against negative energy attacks. The mask has 10 charges when made. Each level of energy drain or point of ability drain prevented costs one charge. For example, a successful hit from a vampire, which normally bestows two negative levels, drains 2 charges from the mask. Once all 10 charges have been expended, the skull mask crumbles to dust.

Caster Level: 8th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *negative energy protection, deathwatch*; *Market Price:* 18,400 gp; *Weight:* 2 lb.

Thieves Picks of Stealth: These magical thieves' tools and case appear to be constructed of a very dark, hard stone, perhaps obsidian. While they are magical, *detect magic* will not reveal this fact. When used, these tools confer a +2 competence bonus to Open Locks and Disable Device skill checks. The greatest power of the tools is revealed when they are placed inside their case, and the case is touched to the user's skin. The case magically melds into the individual's body. There the tools safely remain, until the owner concentrates on bringing them to the surface. If the wielder is slain while the tools are melded with his skin, the tools reemerge. The case will not meld into the skin if empty, or if it contains items other than the tools.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *nondetection*; *Market Price:* 2,000 gp; *Weight:* —.

Waukeen's Curing Clasp: Fashioned by the Ravens Bluff clergy of Waukeen in the period during which their goddess was lost to the Realms, this fine golden cloak clasp displays the profile of Merchant's Friend. By touch, the clasp may dispense 10 points of healing every day. The owner may choose to divide these points upon multiple recipients, as she doesn't have to use it all at once. Invoking the power of Waukeen's curing clasp is a standard action.

Caster Level: 7th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *cure light wounds*; *Market Price:* 5,600 gp; *Weight:* —.

Waukeen's Curing Clasp

Taverns: Gateways to Adventure

BY STEPHEN RADNEY-MACFARLAND ILLUSTRATIONS BY VINCE LOCKE

Why do most DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventures start in a tavern? Is it cliché? Are most writers and Dungeon Masters that uncreative? Or are taverns tailor-made as a starting point for the sword and sorcery quest?

While the number of uncreative card-board façade taverns in fantasy roleplaying are legion, it is also true that the historical medieval tavern was one of those rare gateway places in its society, and because of this, it is not unreasonable that it became the fantasy genre's default portal to adventure. It does a perfect duty of transitioning the adventurer from civilization to the danger-filled world beyond, because the tavern is a mixture of both of these places. This article explores the historical gateway traits of the tavern in order to supply a tavern-weary DM with meat for his or her creative soup the next time the need for a tavern comes into play. The end of the article illustrates some of the themes presented from historical example by way of the Empty Sign, a tavern located in a dark corner of the city of Ravens Bluff, and truly a place were the wild world connects with civilized folk in the City of Ravens.

ENTER THE TAVERN

In here you'll dine well, in here!
We've got warm bread and warm herring,
And wine from Auxerre, by the barrel full.
—A tavern keeper's enticement yelled to a passerby
From the miracle play,
Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas

What is a tavern? It's almost a silly question. If you've ever played DUNGEONS & DRAGONS or other fantasy roleplaying games, you've already got an image in mind—a tavern is a place to hear rumors about that orc band harassing caravans; a tavern is a place to find that dark stranger in the corner who just happens to want to hire the PCs for some wild adventure; a tavern is the place you find that new best friend after losing your last one to the deadly crush of a hill giant's maul. In short the tavern is the great house of fantasy (and more specifically fantasy roleplaying) cliché!

The funny thing about clichés is that they are akin to the punchline of a joke. They are the end of a story with which we have become familiar. Given time, all one has to do is blurt out the punchline, and everyone shares in the joke, albeit much cheapened. The "joke" associated with the tavern has been lost, however, so to do the tavern justice one must answer this seemingly simple question by supplying reasons for its rise in Europe during the High Middle Ages.

The ancient world had its taverns, feast halls and baths, but when the Western Roman Empire fell under the weight of the Germanic Migrations during the 4th-6th centuries, urban centers, and the institutions that were associated with them, declined. For many centuries European society became more localized and isolated, as trade disintegrated to a fraction of what it was under the aegis of the Romans. As even a casual student of history knows, this circumstance, the so-called "Dark Ages," was temporary. As the Roman Catholic Church rebuilt the bureaucracy its ancestors had maintained during the late Empire, the new feudal rulers of Europe acquired new lands and trade began to slowly grow again. While both the Church and the Germanic institutions that held sway during the early Middle Ages gave preference to a system of barter and charity to lodge travelers, such traditions could not keep up with the demand for the new influx of traders and pilgrims that, after the first millennia AD, again choked European roads. In Florence private commercial taverns began to pop up by 1065. Outside the Italian peninsula taverns reemerged between 1150-1350.

The commercial tavern began in the urban home of nobles and merchants. With the influx of new travelers these folks realized that they could make extra income by renting unused rooms. The money-making ability of such endeavors grew from there, as nobles, merchants, and even clergy began to buy buildings within cities and towns expressly to host taverns, they added amenities along the way, chief of which were wine (both local, and imported), gambling, common rooms, and prostitution. Visitors were not the only ones who enjoyed these amenities; locals also flocked to the good times that taverns had to offer.

While theologians and moralists frowned upon these places, and popular mystery plays (a Medieval form of entertainment that was part moral lesson, part sitcom) depicted the tavern as the Temple of the Devil, there was little anyone could do to squash a tavern's popularity and its ability to generate revenues that usually exceeded those generated by more traditional feudal holdings. While the church decried the tavern, abbots owned them and priors enjoyed them on a

regular basis, a fact that stories and art from the Middle Ages often illustrated. Ironically, the same troubadours and entertainers who frequently painted the tavern as a den of inequity in mystery plays also depended on its patronage for work. Because of them the tavern became a place to hear the sometimes wild and sometimes true stories about the world as well as a place to enjoy the contorting entertainment of jesters and jugglers.

The tavern was second only to the great Fairs (annual markets throughout many cities in Europe, the most famous being the two Fairs of Champagne that took place in the French County of its namesake) as homes to commercial transactions. In a private corner, merchants were able to conduct transactions and make agreements with their back to the wall. While agreements of merchants were initiated in the marketplace, the final transaction was almost always signed and sealed within the walls of the tavern.

In short, the punchline of the D&D tavern owes its genesis to the historical species of the beast. Taverns were a place in which diverse folk met, slept when away from home, created business partnerships, heard rumors, got drunk, gambled, and exchanged in other even more questionable behavior. The tavern served as a two-way portal between the city and the places beyond its walls.

OUTSIDE THE LAW

Whereas such offenders as aforesaid going about by night, do commonly resort and have their meetings and hold their evil talk in taverns more than elsewhere, and there do seek for shelter, lying in wait, and watching their time to do mischief; it is enjoined that none do keep a tavern open for wine or ale, after the tolling of the curfew.
—From the Statutes for the City of London, 1285

Since the tavern was a stopover for travelers, it was also the place where local people most often mixed with foreigners. Many taverns were also run, if not owned, by foreigners. Travelers would actively search out and stay in taverns owned or run by a fellow foreigner, where they would be amongst those familiar to them in language and culture. The foreign influence of taverns did no favors to their reputation. Foreigners were often scapegoats for a city's troubles, and taverns catering to outsiders were prime targets for the points of fingers and the stabs of gossip. In London a 1285 statute decreed that no foreigner could own a tavern or lodging house on the waterside of the Thames because of fear the foreigners were more likely to form covens and hurt riverside industry. Other cities had statutes keeping foreigner-owned inns away from wells and water supplies, to avoid poisoned water supplies. Imagine a tavern in Ravens Bluff (or elsewhere in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting) that catered

Danger delivered with velvet glove.

The deal is struck.

to merchants from Thay or Zhentil Keep, and how suspect the folk inhabiting that place might by seen by their neighbors—at times rightly so!

Because of a tavern's unique position (and sometimes legal status) as a "community outside the community," activities that a citizen would never think of engaging in outside the tavern became fair game inside. Such activities were tolerated because of the typical medieval view that foreigners and travelers were more flawed and sinful than "normal" people. The tavern became a way for a community to contain its own wickedness, as well as the dangers of foreigners. Because the tavern was wickeder than the rest of the community, and often was the den of foreigners, a tavern was subject to different laws than the rest of the community.

Usually the tavern keeper was responsible for the good conduct of his or her guests and the safety of their guests' private property. In a way the tavern was a vassal of the city. At times the tavern keep could dish out its own punishment for misdeeds within his or her tavern's walls. Just because the laws said that a tavern keeper was beholden to his guests it does not mean that they were vigilant in their responsibility. Tavern owners were often rich men, or allied with the powerful, and many times could bribe their way out of trouble. At other times a tavern was so disreputable, or within a neighborhood that was considered so dangerous, that the law would avoid the place whenever possible. In fact, may tavern keepers were brought to court only if they broke guild law—which was the greatest kind crime to medieval cosmopolitans. Still, in your fantasy campaign there may be some very good reason for higher-level denizens of a city to become a tavern keeper. Retired adventurers looking for the "easy money" of a tavern may be the only ones to keep those troublesome sell-swords and mercenary spellcasters in line. Since the tavern keeper was rarely the owner of a tavern (nobles and powerful merchants usually owned a number of taverns in a particular city or cities, while tavern keepers acted as property managers), owners may actively seek out daring individuals now a little long in the tooth to oversee particularly rowdy establishments.

TAVERNS AS THE SITE OF ADVENTURE

The dice that the dice maker made
Have robbed me of my robe.
The dice are killing me.
They lie in wait and spy on me.
They assault me and defy me.
—Amadas et Idoin
an anonymous 13th century romance

Mix enough alcohol, gold by gambling or by commerce, and some swords and spells, and eventually you'll end up with an adventure. While taverns are not typically sites for the noblest questing, a fun session or two can be had with the intrigues that a tavern, by its very nature, supplies.

Many taverns, such as London's Pyr in Quenhithe, had a well-earned reputation as "a good shadowing for thieves and many evil bargains." If it's do-gooder combat your PCs are searching for, dice games in taverns frequently ended in murderous rage. Saving a winner may just earn a long-term friend and contact, and future game hook. Thieves often stalked drunken merchants and gambling winners. Plots against this lord or that were hatched, daring burglaries planned, and mercenaries hired. When planning adventures around the tavern, stress the extreme emotions of its patrons. The taverns were emotive and explosive places, whether too much drink, greed, or the nadir of desperation fueled none-too-wise action.

Make your taverns dynamic, filled with folk who have exaggerated plights, strong opinions, and heady desires. Because the tavern is filled with folks far from home (and away from social pressures to act in their normal

fashions) or local people escaping the toil of the day, the truly bizarre can occur under its rafters. Try reading the police watch section of your local newspaper and watch out for stories set in modern bars. The strange things that can occur will astound you. Mix swords, spells, and the egos of adventures and your players will never encounter the quiet tavern where locals sip their drink and one person simply waits to hire them again.

THE EMPTY SIGN

I have seen that old orc, and he is a horrid beast. I have seen better swordsmen than you served up on his table. If your mind is really set on ending his foul feasts, I would coat my sword with deathblade, or splash that gray gnasher with dragon's bile. Where would you get such foul and illegal stuff? Look for the tavern with no paint on its sign. Approach the old addle in the corner, and whisper the name of Kelemvor's scribe

—The advice that saved the
ranger Kallut, and slew
Urgathak the Eyebiter
Year of the Sword

Just off a winding little way that locals call Crackedback Alley, and a mere stone's throw from the corner of Thavverdasz Way and Khalahmongre Street, stands a four-story leaning dive adorned only with a plain pine sign. If the Shadysteets Neighborhood of Crow's End had a bowel, the Empty Sign tavern would be its closest neighbor.

During the daylight hours this shady and shuttered building is lazy but ominous. Its once whitewashed walls are now sooty and black as Talona's heart, and the beggars who lean up against it are too infirm and sickly to raise their tin cups for alms. Its dreary daytime guise vanishes at night as warm fires and throaty laughter give the Empty Sign an inviting allure. The place is frequented by locals of Crows End and numerous sell-swords from the

SO, WHO'S SITTING NEXT TO ME?

You never know whom you will be sitting next to in a tavern. Here are 20 examples in an encounter table. Give a d20 a whirl next time your players ask "so, who else is in the tavern?"

1) **A cleric** from the same order or an allied order as a cleric or paladin in the PCs' party is intoxicated and making a fool of him or herself. The cleric should be doing something that would be considered embarrassing to his or her order.

2) **A cleric** from a rival or enemy order to that of a cleric or paladin among the PCs is intoxicated and running his mouth off about the superiority of his particular faith over the faith of the PC cleric or paladin.

3) **A tradesman** (from one of the craft guilds) believes his wife is cheating on him. He tries to talk the PCs into helping him find out who she is sleeping with. He promises good coin for their trouble.

4) **A young girl** from one of the villages surrounding the city is looking for adventurers to help her family. She claims the local lord is treating the villagers unjustly.

5) **A large and smelly laborer** who has had far too much to drink picks a fight with one of the PCs. His drunkenness gives him courage and resolve, and he will only quit his assault once he has been knocked unconscious or worse.

6) **A paladin** is disgusted with some activity he or she finds within the tavern. He or she vows to put a stop to it "right this instant..."

7) **A city guardsman** mistakes one of the PCs for a wanted criminal. He and a group of his companions attempt to arrest the PCs.

8) **A mischievous gnome illusionist** decides one of PCs is in dire need of a practical joke or two.

9) **A young woman** of the night dreams of becoming and adventurer, but first must pay the tavern keeper what she owes him...

10) **A foreign noble** is looking for armed folk to protect his caravan on the way to the next trade city. He offers double, or even triple the going rate. He neglects to tell them about the contraband he is carrying.

11) **A local landlord** is having trouble with theft. He tries to talk the PCs into guarding his goods.

12) **A young dandy** claims that he is the luckiest person ever to play dice. He offers incredible odds to anyone who wagers with him. The funny thing is that he hardly ever looses...

13) **A young man** tells the PCs that his father is sick, and is in need of a cleric. The young man is actually the point man for a gang of thieves.

14) **Three flirtatious women** (or men) outrageously flirt with one of the PCs. They will not quit until they have had too much drink and are no longer able to stand.

15) **A dark stranger** stands in the corner. It is a noble waiting for his or her secret lover.

16) **A charlatan** sells fake potions, amulets, and *Quaal's feather tokens*.

17) **A guildsman** from the dice-making guild is watching the gambling in the tavern, looking for unscrupulous folk using loaded dice.

18) **A young man** (or woman) intently watches another person in the tavern. He or she plans on killing the person as revenge for some slight.

19) **A small mob of halfling merchants** visits the tavern to sample all the tavern keep's wines, looking for the best wines to bring back to their people.

20) **A demon-possessed killer** sits mumbling to himself at a corner table, waiting to lash out at any who approach him with a barely concealed infernal rage.

Beware of the bouncer....he is lightening quick.

Dales, Sembia, and Cormyr, who have come to know the tavern keeper, a middle-aged and earthy ex-adventurer named Besant Sessrendale (Human male, Rog4/Brd5; N; Sense Motive +12, Bluff +15, Intimidate +10), as an excellent source of news and rumor. Many mercenaries and magelings-for-hire from those lands depend upon Besant's
intelligence (from sources he keeps "as hush as Lashan's fate") for news of their homeland, and for the keeper to find them steady work—usually defending southward-bound caravans. (Regulars of the Empty Sign can consult Besant for information involving these subjects, and doing so grants a +15 bonus to related Gather Information checks).

Be warned, though. Visitors to the Empty Sign who are stupid enough to admit they are Archendale folk will soon be introduced to a world of hurt. Besant's surname is taken from the now defunct Dale of his ancestry, which was plundered and salted by Archendale a little more than a century ago; neither Besant nor his three cousins (Jaus, Kailur, and Treyor, human males, Ftr3, Ftr4 and Ftr 6, respectively; N) treat that event as ancient history.

Like his news, Besant prefers his ale Dalesish, and goes to great care to acquire what imported drink he can, and when he can't he hires brewers in the city who will brew in the Dales' fashion. The prices for these drinks are twice or thrice as high as other taverns in Crow's End. For those who "know no better," he keeps a barrel or two of Vast lager, which he sells for the Merchant's Guild-regulated four copper a mug price. He will never vouch its purity, though. A barrel of this brew can sit for months at a time under the counter until some poor soul requests a cup of "that foul and pale coppered stuff," as Besant is apt to call it.

Like many tavern keepers in Shadystreets, Besant hosts dice and card games in the upper floors of his tavern. Unlike the other taverns these dice games are organized and regulated by the house, and overseen by Besant's trio of no-nonsense cousins. Besant claims that his games are always fair, and often disparages other taverns, especially The Salty Dog, for their uneven dice and dog-eared cards. The favorite dice game among the patrons is a Sembian knucklebone throw called hazard, which owes it name to the fact that the more one wins, the more one is required to bet. On the fifth and fifteenth day of every month high-stakes games are played on the third floor of the Sign, and in those games it is not uncommon for a treasure-trove of hard-earned adventurer's loot to be won or lost by the "hazard" of a final throw.

While Besant and his cousins are not pimps, they do overlook the men and women who do a brisk trade at the Sign. Besant was once overheard that keeping them around was good for

business: "the dance that initiates such coupling is often washed with dark ale and posturing aside the die wall. It is hard to argue with the will of Sharess, and who am I to turn away coins that fall from those who dance to that goddess' song?"

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF

"Basil, basil, fizzle flink! Flibberdy floo! Flibberty floo!"
—The rumored strange verbal component of Aveugles' *lightning bolt* spell.

Besides the unpainted sign that gives the tavern its name, the Empty Sign is home to another oddity—an old man whom Besant calls Aveugles (A bit of Chondathan slang, meaning "blind"). Dressed in rags and missing much of his hair and many of his teeth, this ancient fellow spends his nights rocking in this or that corner within the Empty Sign. His eyes are not cataracts, and at times the dirty old fellow does not seem blind at all, just addle-brained. The regulars say that the only thing blind about him, in truth, is his fury. Though more folk claim to have only heard tales about the old beggar's grim deeds than actually have seen them, Aveugles (Human male—at least Sor5) is well known for the spell-hurled death he inflicts upon those doing overly violent or dangerous things within the Sign. Besant, if confronted with the tales about his mad barfly, calls the stories drunken nonsense, but most think that he covers for the crazed mage because his spell hurling always is to the benefit of the tavern keep. The first bit of information that old hands pass on to newer patrons is that "if you hear a crackling voice shout 'basil, basil,' jump quickly lest you be caught in a rain of arcane fire or lightning." Regulars can be both grave and flippant about the old man's rumored deeds in the same breath, so it is hard to tell whether even they think Aveugles a powerful mage or simply the brunt of a long-standing joke.

INNUENDO

"When good keeper Besant sits, he does so on a Throne of Iron, if you know what I mean."
—Hectato of Urmlaspyr to Lady Saeress Saprana Fleetwood at a Ravenian gala, the night before he was found floating in the Fire River.

Many rumors surround the Empty Sign, most started by the keepers of other taverns and gambling halls within Shadeystreet's maze. Those keepers who are natives of the Vast often site the Sembian influence within the Sign as a corruptive element. Others do not trust the Cormyrians, claiming the Steel Regent will take after her father and send Purple Dragons on foolish crusades on foreign shores. Others claim the place is a stomping ground for Those Who Harp, an organization that while some Ravenaars respect, few trust not to meddle in the affairs of the Bluff.

Some of the most pervasive rumors insist that Besant is an agent of the Iron Throne, a secretive and powerful trade organization based primarily in Cormyr and Sembia. While the Iron Throne claims to be a simple cartel of merchants and allied caravan costers, many fear that their secretive goals hide infernal plots. If confronted with such accusations, Besant responds with a hearty laugh, followed with a long and animated diatribe about the plight of honest foreign merchants in the City of Ravens. He is also quick to point out that he has been investigated by the Watch on at least three occasions after folks were found dead days after claiming to they had proof of the Besant/Iron Throne relationship. The Dalesman has never been charged, though magical means supplied by the Tyrrans of The Silver Halls have been used during two of the three rounds of questioning. Besant claims a business rival or two are responsible for the deaths—attempting to tarnish his reputation by way of misdirection and skullduggery.

Either due to his supposed connection to the Iron Throne, or rivals wishing to slander his name, rumors abound that the tavern keeper sells poisons by way of the seemly insane Aveugles. Patrons of the Sign laugh at such accusations, pointing out that the sad old man eats rats, and can typically be found drooling in this corner or that—if he in all his life brewed a poison, he must have drank the concoction himself, to his own ruin.

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H.H. Holmes: America's First Serial Killer:

A New Villain for Masque of the Red Death Campaigns

by: Matthew Sernett Illustrations: Vince Locke

Mass murderer, serial killer, psychopath; these appellations are the product of a later age. In those days no one had yet conceived the words that were necessary to describe the abomination named Herman Mudgett. Perhaps it was fitting then that they knew him by another name. He was called by newspapers H. H. Holmes; a name he chose for himself, one of many he used. And it was by this name he was recognized by *The Guinness Book of World Records* as "the most prolific murderer known" and by newspapers as the "greatest criminal of the century."

In 1888, across the sea in London, a vicious, mad murderer began a reign of terror in the dark alleys and secluded courtyards of Whitechapel. To newspaper readers in sunny Chicago, stories of the grisly work of "Jack the Ripper" were titillating and horrifying, but those stories were nothing compared to the cold-blooded deeds that were taking place quietly around them and that would take eight years to end.

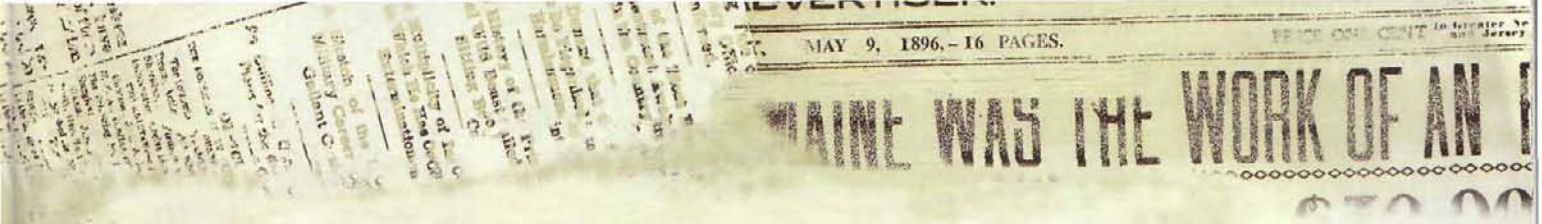
When Holmes was finally finished, hanged and twitching, 27 murders and disappearances were answered for by a signed confession, and another 200 would remain forever unsolved. America's first serial killer was a cunning predator, charismatic con-man, and flawless liar, and even the threat of death could not wring the whole truth from him.

"I was born with the Devil in me."

–H. H. Holmes

"A boy with a head on him," residents of Gilmanton Academy said. "A lad with a future." Born Herman Mudgett in a small town in New Hampshire in 1860, Holmes was one of those smart quiet children. Slight, bookish, and with a peculiarly grown-up attitude, he was often bullied and mocked by other children. Life was no better at home. Holmes' father was a brutal disciplinarian and his mother was too meek and submissive to step in on her son's behalf. At least, that's what Holmes would have you believe.

Records of Holmes' early years are sparse and most of what is known about that time comes from Holmes' own confessions. Holmes was a habitual and convincing



liar, often weaving just enough truth into his stories to convince, but more than one of his versions of his origins were utter fabrications with no basis in fact. This version is merely the most plausible. Part of what makes this version more convincing than the others is Holmes' admission that he hated his parents and often imagined their deaths. That statement, even if untrue, is so true to Holmes' character that it is difficult to disbelieve. But that was Holmes' greatest strength—every lie he told was difficult to disbelieve.

One of the most intriguing and convincing stories in Holmes' confessions is a traumatic event to which he attributed his keen interest in anatomy. When Holmes was five years old, he was walking by the local doctor's office when he was surprised by two older boys. Holmes was nearly phobic about the dark little building because of its strange chemical odors, foul-tasting medicine, and the rumors that the doctor kept preserved human heads and amputated limbs in jars hidden in his cabinets. Having learned of Holmes' horror of the place, the two boys grabbed him by the arms and dragged him screaming across the threshold. Eyes blurred by tears, it seemed to Holmes that he could see a boney specter within, reaching out with skeletal arms to ensnare him. The doctor arrived shortly, summoned from the back by all the commotion. He sent the two bullies off and tried to comfort Holmes, but the damage had been done.

By the age of eleven Holmes was conducting secret medical experiments, first on insects, then salamanders and frogs, and soon on rabbits, cats, and stray dogs. Holmes preferred living subjects and became skilled at disabling animals without killing them. Sometimes he kept souvenirs of his handiwork, such as a skull or paw. These he hid in a metal box in his parents' cellar. Given his quiet demeanor and his need for secrecy, it is unsurprising that Holmes would have few friends, and according to Holmes, he had but one: A boy of the same age named Tom who died in what Holmes would call a "tragic accident"—killed by a fall from a second story landing in an abandoned house the two boys were exploring.

"To parallel such a career one must go back to past ages and to the time of the Borgias or Brinvilliers, and even these were not such human monsters as Holmes seems to have been. He is a prodigy of wickedness, a human demon, a being so unthinkable that no novelist would dare to invent such a character. The story, too, tends to illustrate the end of the century."
–The Chicago Times-Herald, May 8, 1896

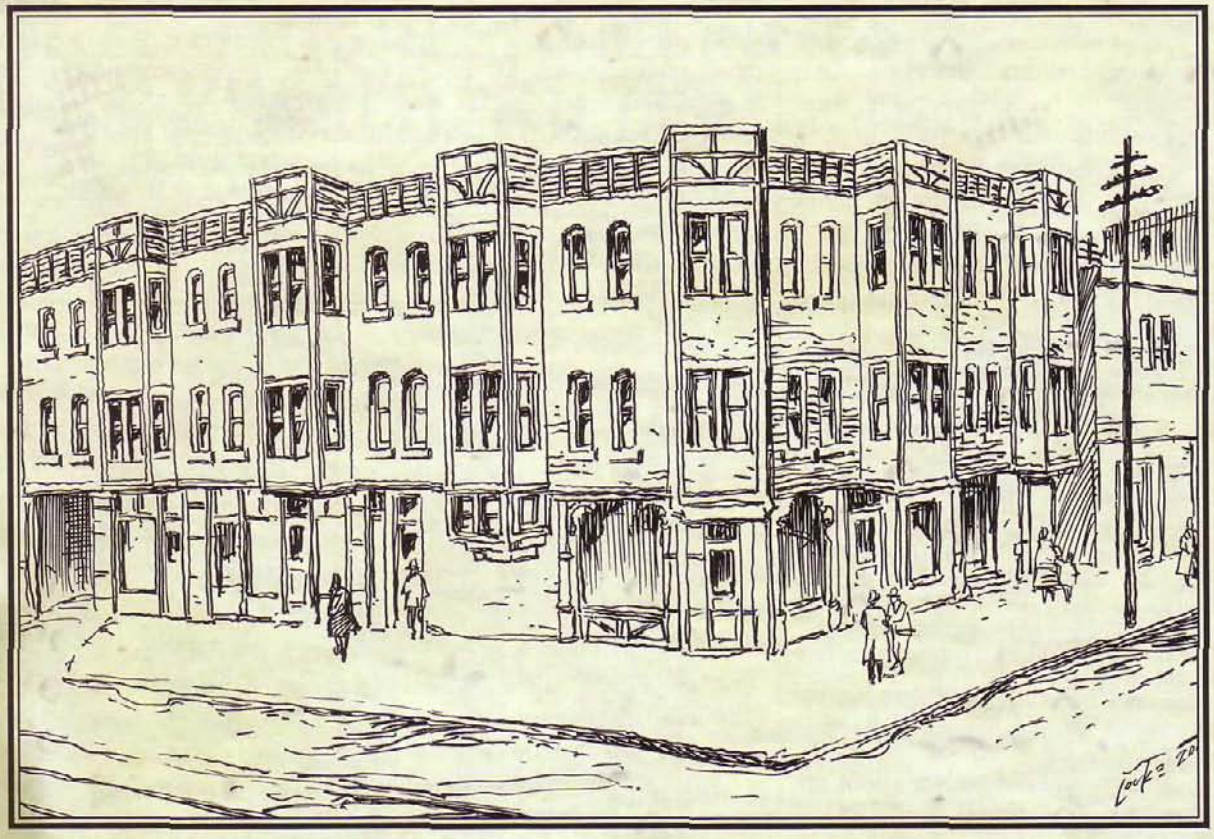
Dr. Holston lay sick in his bed bundled in covers despite the sweltering heat outside. Downstairs his wife valiantly attempted to run the family drugstore herself. Dr. E. S. Holston's Drugstore was located at a busy intersection in Englewood, a growing suburb of Chicago. In the hustle and bustle of that hot summer of 1886, few noticed the dapper gentleman loitering outside. He appeared to be admiring the beauty of the neighborhood, or perhaps studying the local architecture. He took note of the steady steam of customers that went into the drugstore and gazed through the window at the beleaguered woman inside.

The gentleman, H. H. Holmes, took a moment to make certain he looked presentable and then followed a customer inside. Mrs. Holston must have been impressed by Holmes for when he offered his assistance she hired him on the spot. She did not inquire closely about his past employment, a fact that Holmes was happy about as his last job in Philadelphia had ended rather poorly. He had been forced to leave the city abruptly after a woman died from taking one of his medications.

Holmes became a fixture in the shop while Mrs. Holston attended to her increasingly ill husband. By the time Dr. Holston died, Holmes was practically running the store by himself. Not long after the funeral, Holmes arranged to buy the store. Soon relations between the two became noticeably tense. Despite the shop's steady business under Holmes' control, Mrs. Holston was receiving no payments. Finally the situation became so dire that she threatened legal action. Then, oddly, she decided to move away from Chicago, or so Holmes told his customers. She was too depressed by living where she and her husband had made their lives, he said. She was never heard from or seen again.

"In the remarkable character of his achievements as an assassin we are apt to loose sight of Holmes' singular skill and daring as a bigamist."
–H. B. Irving, A Book of Remarkable Criminals (1918)

The success of Dr. E. S. Holston's Drugstore during the late 1880's was due in large part to the verve and suave allure of its proprietor. A natural ladies' man, Holmes had many regular female customers. On one such customer he lavished more than his usual charm. Myrta Z. Belknap was a pretty, buxom young lady who lived in Englewood. Long before Mrs. Holston disappeared, Holmes could be seen walking with Myrta in nearby parks. On January 28, 1887, Holmes and Myrta were married.



At first Holmes allowed Myrta to work with him in the drugstore but eventually he required her to busy herself with household chores and window shopping. He found it difficult to deal with other women while she was around. The marriage soon became strained and by the spring of 1888 Myrta was pregnant. She moved to Wilmette, Illinois rather than getting a divorce and Holmes happily returned to his normal flirtatious behavior. Though he regarded Myrta as a serious inconvenience, he may have held some soft feelings for her, for in February of 1887, Holmes filed divorce papers against Clara Lovering Mudgett of Alton, New Hampshire. He never followed through on the divorce of his first wife, but perhaps the strongest evidence of Holmes' feelings for Myrta comes from the fact that unlike many other women who became intimately involved with Holmes, Myrta Z. Belknap lived to an old age.

"In America's whole domains there is not a house like that one, and there probably never will be. Its chimney's stick out where chimneys never stuck out before, its staircases do not end anywhere in particular, it has winding passages that bring the intruder back to where he started with a jerk and altogether it is a very mysterious sort of building."
–Chicago Tribune, November 25, 1893

The apartment above the store was too small to accommodate his appetites so by the summer of 1888, Holmes secured a lease on the property across the street. Constructed between the fall of 1888 and spring of 1890, Holmes' new building occupied every inch of the 50 by 162 foot lot on the corner of 63rd and Wallace Street. It was a source of great interest to people in the area. Although not an unimpressive structure, it was not the size of the building so much as it was the amount of activity at the construction site that kindled such curiosity.

None of the workman stayed on the job for more than a week or two. This served Holmes' purposes well as none of them could get familiar enough with the structure to become suspicious. Holmes was the consummate swindler, and the "fire and hire" process also saved him money. In those days a workman would often work two weeks before asking to be paid and as soon as he did, Holmes fired him on the

spot. Some workers filed suits against him, but Holmes mired these in litigation. For those who resorted to physical threats, Holmes had a different tactic. That tactic took the form of Benjamin Pitezel.

In November of 1889, Pitezel answered a help-wanted ad. A handsome man with a hot temper and shifty intelligence, he was hired on like any other worker but soon he found himself performing a host of tasks. An alcoholic and ne'er-do-well, Pitezel's only real redeeming quality was his loyalty—loyalty to his wife and children and unfortunately, to H. H. Holmes.

Workmen weren't the only ones cheated by Holmes. He swindled companies of building supplies, a massive kiln, a large zinc tank, various vats, acids, quick-lime, and asbestos-covered sheet-iron plates. He acquired a bank vault on credit and built a room around it. When creditors came for their money he refused to pay. They tried to reclaim the vault but Holmes threatened a lawsuit if they harmed the building, and the vault stayed where it was.

The bottom floor in what would become known locally as "the Castle" consisted of stores and a restaurant, some run by Holmes and others leased to local merchants. The second and third floor contained apartments and Holmes' home and private office. The rooms were all comfortably furnished but arranged in a confusing manner, with hallways taking strange, unexpected turns and dimly lit by widely-spaced gaslights. Stairways led to nowhere, and many doors were perpetually locked. The second floor had no less than 51 doors, 6 zig-zagging hallways, and 35 rooms. A few were fitted up as ordinary bedrooms, others were not. Some were made airtight with the asbestos-covered plates, others were soundproofed, and some were so narrow and had such low ceilings that they were little more than coffins. Most were rigged with gas pipes whose control valves were hidden in Holmes' bedroom. Doors could be locked from the outside with keys only Holmes had, and most had peepholes so Holmes could watch his guests. The second floor held other secrets such as concealed closets accessible by sliding panels, trapdoors, secret passages, and greased chutes, but it was nothing compared to the horrors that awaited victims in the basement.

Like a cavernous dungeon, the thickly walled basement held all the accouterments of a torture chamber. Cases of shiny surgical tools surrounded a stained wooden dissecting table onto which Holmes could tie his victims. An "elasticity determinator" stood off to the side. Holmes would later claim that he used it in the hopes of creating a "race of giants," but it was nothing less than a medieval torture rack, which Holmes used to tear people apart. The dank cellar also contained quicklime vats and an acid tank to dispose of bodies. And against one wall squatted the bulk of the huge kiln Holmes had swindled. Three feet wide, 3 feet high, and 8 feet long, the kiln was perfectly suited for the purpose Holmes had intended. It served him as a convenient crematorium. Little wonder that in the coming years the Castle would become known as Bluebeard's Castle, the Nightmare Castle, Murder Castle, and the Castle of Horror.

In July of 1890 Holmes sold Dr. E. S. Holston's Drugstore. The man who bought it was surprised Holmes was willing to sell such a profitable business, but happy to take over—happy until Holmes opened the "H. H. Holmes Pharmacy" across the road.

"'A violent man enticeth his neighbor ... Moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass."
–Proverbs 16: 29,30

By March of 1891, Holmes had seduced Julia Conner, wife of the manager of his jewelry store on the Castle's first floor. The manager waffled for some time, unwilling to give up on his marriage and his family, but eventually he could stand no more and divorced Julia and left her and their daughter. Julia was an intelligent and inquisitive woman and she pressed Holmes to allow her to help with his businesses and to give her more control. Holmes soon grew tired of the willful woman and the final straw was when she informed him she was pregnant and that she expected him to marry her. Holmes agreed, on one condition. She would have to have an abortion. One child was enough, he said. Holmes promised to perform the operation himself, to save her the embarrassment. Julia didn't like the idea at all but she was in love and Holmes threatened to throw her out if she did not comply. On December 24, 1891, Holmes convinced her it was time and left her in his office while he put her daughter Pearl "to sleep." Then he took Julia down into his basement laboratory.

In January Holmes discovered one of his employees had a special skill—mounting human

skeletons. Charles M. Chappell had some experience doing so while working for a contractor at Bennett Medical College. When he mentioned it to Holmes, Holmes led him up to a dimly lit second floor room. Chappell could tell the corpse on the table was a woman though she looked "like a jackrabbit that had been skinned by splitting the skin down the face and rolling it back off the entire body." Holmes offered Chappell $36 to finish cleaning it and to mount the skeleton, and Chappell—who apparently assumed the skeleton was a cadaver Holmes had been autopsying—agreed. A week later the job was done and a week after that Holmes sold it for $200.

In the spring of 1892, Holmes sent his crony Pitezel to Dwight, Michigan for treatment of his alcoholism. The treatment failed and Pitezel relapsed, but Holmes' effort was not wasted. Pitezel returned with stories of Emeline Cigrand, a tall, shapely, blond, twenty-four-year-old. Within a week of Pitezel's return, Holmes wrote to Emeline offering her a job as his private secretary for $18 a week, and in may of 1892, she arrived. By early fall, Miss Cigrand had become Holmes' mistress. Holmes promised to marry her but insisted that she refer to him by an alias, Robert E. Phelps. Complications with a previous marriage demanded such caution, he claimed.

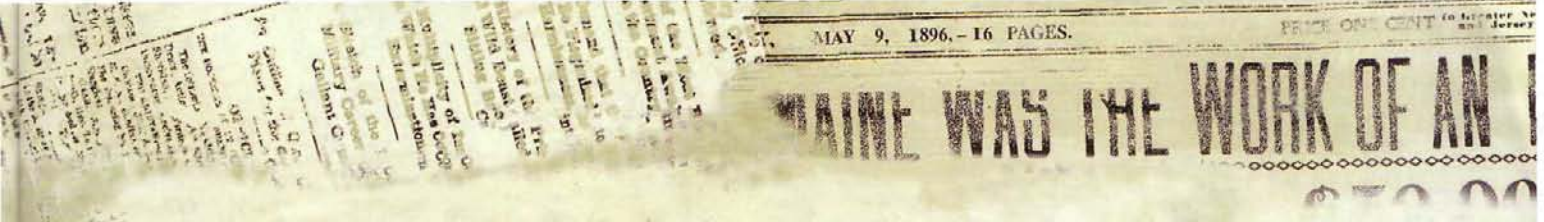
The wedding was scheduled for the first week in December and Holmes had Emeline address blank envelopes to her family and friends—for wedding invitations, he said. Then in the first week of December Holmes called her into his office and asked her to fetch something from his safe. As she searched for the papers, Holmes swung shut the door and locked it. Emeline, at first confused, meekly asked to be let out, then pleaded, and over the course of the four hours it took for her to suffocate, devolved into complete hysteria. Holmes pulled up a chair outside and listened in a state of arousal until she fell silent. On December 17, her friends and family received a wedding announcement saying that Emeline Cigrand had been married to Robert Phelps. The newspaper in her hometown wrote a glowing announcement of the wedding saying at one point, "The bride, after completing her education, was employed as a stenographer in the County Recorder's office. From there she went to Dwight, and from there to Chicago, where she met her fate." Not long after, the LaSalle Medical School became the proud owner of a fine female skeleton, acquired from Dr. H. H. Holmes.

""There was one strange thing that troubled me; amid the occupations and amusements of the fair, nothing was more common than for a person—whether at a feast, theater, or church, or trafficking for wealth or honors, or whatever he might be doing, and however unseasonable the interruption—suddenly to vanish like a soap bubble, and be never more seen of his fellows."
–Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Celestial Railroad

In 1893 the Columbian Exposition came to Chicago, and starting on opening day, Holmes ran ads in newspapers promoting his "World's Fair Hotel." It's unknown how many people came to stay at his Castle nor how many would never leave, but certainly on most nights between May and October, Holmes had it filled to capacity.

The methods Holmes employed in killing his victims are easy to surmise. Nearly every one of the apartments on the second and third floor could, by means of a series of valves hidden in Holmes' bedchamber, be filled with asphyxiating gas. Visitors would not have heard the quiet hissing of the pipes in their slumber. Chloroform was another crucial part of Holmes' murder repertoire. Opening up a door with his master keys and stealthily crossing the room with a chemical-soaked rag was a skill Holmes had practiced over the years. Disposing of the bodies was equally easy. Greased chutes carried them into his cellar where they could be dissected, experimented upon, or otherwise enjoyed at his leisure. Then the bodies could be cremated in his kiln, dissolved away, bricked into a wall, or made ready for mounting by Chappell. Their personal effects (jewelry, money and so on) became Holmes'.

At the time of the fair Holmes had a new love, Minnie Williams, heir to a considerable fortune. Minnie was taken with Holmes and readily signed over her property and inheritance to him. Nothing stood between Holmes and the money but Minnie's younger sister Nannie. Should something unfortunate befall Minnie, Nannie would be sure to investigate. So Holmes had Minnie invite her sister to come and see the fair. The three spent a happy day touring the World's Fair and the next day Holmes took Nannie to see his Castle while he had Minnie attend to some pressing household chores. They had finished the tour when



Holmes suddenly remembered that he needed something from his vault. Holding Nannie by the hand, he lead her inside. Later he returned to Minnie's apartment and explained he had decided to take both girls to dinner and that Nannie was waiting for them at the castle. Minnie excitedly got dressed for a night on the town, then Holmes led her away to join her sister.

"Times shall unfold what plighted cunning hides."
-Shakespeare, King Lear

In the fall of 1893, Holmes was once again engaged to be married, this time to Georgiana Yoke and under the alias Henry Mansfield Howard. He had been interested in her for some time but had not been able to pay as much attention to her as he would have liked while he had the Williams sisters to deal with. He and Georgiana were married that winter but then Holmes explained he had to leave town.

Creditors were finally coming down hard on Holmes and he needed time to claim Minnie Williams' inheritance. He left instructions with Pat Quinlan, janitor at the castle, took out several insurance policies on his building, and left town with Benjamin Pitezel.

The fire destroyed almost the entire third floor of the building before the fire department got it under control. Holmes tried to collect but an insurance investigator, made suspicious by Holmes' rapidly tarnishing reputation, found evidence that the fire broke out in several places at once—a sure sign of arson. Holmes protested but failed to get any money.

But Holmes knew more than one way to get money from an insurance company. Holmes laid his plan before Pitezel and Pitezel took a $10,000 policy out on his life. They would fake Pitezel's death, Holmes said, and split the money. All they needed was a body. Holmes knew where he would get the body but that was a detail of the plan he deliberately left vague.

In time he would murder Pitezel and then lead investigators on a chase that would crisscross the country before murdering three of Pitezel's four children. Once suspicion of Holmes was aroused, police began investigating the Holmes Castle, as rumor placed the bodies of the Williams sisters buried in the basement. Each day brought surprising new horrors.

They began by poking around in the cellar but were daunted by its size. They returned the next day with a crew of city construction workers and set about looking for a likely hiding spot, such as a buried well. Meanwhile investigators explored the second floor and were astonished by what they found: sliding walls, blind hallways, and camouflaged chutes to the cellar. On the top floor they found more grim evidence of Holmes' dark side: the bank vault, sound-proofed chambers, and an iron stove 3 feet in diameter and 8 feet tall with a door "sufficiently large to admit a human body." Among the ashes inside was a scrap of a woman's dress, several buttons, and bone-like fragments. From the stove's chimney they retrieved a clump of human hair.

The crew in the cellar found more evidence of evil deeds: bone fragments in a pile of ash, a blood-stained woman's undergarment, and hidden behind a brick wall, the tank of poisonous gas Holmes used to kill many of his victims. Later they discovered a padlocked storage chamber in which hung a darkly stained noose. It was apparently the bottom of a secret dumb-waiter shaft into which Holmes could push a victim after securing the rope around her neck. In a mass of quicklime they discovered the partially decomposed skeleton of what could only be a child of six or eight. As the excavations continued the police became aware that they were dealing with a new phenomena, something they dubbed a "multi-murderer."

The names of alleged victims began to mount: Emiline Cigrand, the stenographer. Emily Van Tassel, a grocer's cashier who struck up an acquaintance with Holmes. Wilfred Cole, a logger who had business with Holmes and disappeared after going to see him. Harry Walker, a secretary of Holmes who died shortly after taking out a $15,000 life insurance policy. A widow named Mrs. Lee, a woman who kept company with Holmes. A physician named Russler who hadn't been seen since 1892. Mabel Barrett, a Boston-born girl. A sixteen-year-old stenographer, Miss Wild. A bookkeeper named Kelly. Three members of the Gorky family, who ran the restaurant on the first floor of the Castle. There was also an indeterminate number of female clerical workers who vanished after taking work in the Castle, and murders in states as distant as New York as well as in nearby cities. Holmes had been very busy.

Holmes was tracked down and captured after a long chase in November of 1894. He remained in captivity without trial until

""Never before, it is safe to say, has there been witnessed in any courtroom within this Commonwealth such a scene as was enacted yesterday in the trial of H. H. Holmes. Mrs. Carrie Pitezel was brought face to face with the man who, his accusers say, killed her husband, her two daughters, and her little son in cold blood. The meeting was more than the poor woman could stand. At the sight of several childish letters in the handwriting of her little ones, she broke down completely, and her piteous moans struck to the heart of everyone in the courtroom. Every heart except one."
–Philadelphia Public Ledger, October 31, 1895

October of the next year, leading investigators on a wild goose chase for three of the Pitezel children. He presided over his own trial—at times calm and collected, at others Holmes ranted and quaked like a madman. The evidence mounted and the verdict was inevitable. The *Boston Globe* ran the headline "No Respite for Holmes. The Devil will get his due."

On the day of his execution Holmes ate his breakfast as any man who had the rest of a long life to look forward to. The guard who awoke him asked him if he was nervous and Holmes responded, "See if I tremble." The hand that Holmes held out was "steady as an iron bar."

Holmes was hanged on the morning of May 7, 1896. The doctor reported that when Holmes was dropped, his neck broke and he died instantly. Holmes had felt no pain, he said. Yet Holmes twitched at the end of the rope, his feet jerking in a weird, rhythmic motion as though he were walking on air. Fifteen minutes after the gallows' trapdoor was opened, Holmes' heart still beat within his chest.

A little more than an hour after his execution, Holmes' body was taken for burial. Per Holmes' instructions, a layer of cement was placed in the bottom of his coffin, then his body was placed inside with a handkerchief covering his face. The plain pine coffin was then filled with cement and the lid was nailed down. Holmes' coffin was lowered into a grave ten feet deep and then concrete was poured around and over the coffin. The remaining eight feet of the grave was filled in with sand and dirt. Holmes' final wish had been fulfilled. No graverobber would defile his body as Holmes had the bodies of so many others.

Herman Mudgett, alias **Henry Howard Holmes**, alias **Robert E. Phelps,** alias **Henry**

Portrait of Madman: H.H. Holmes.

"I could not help the fact that I was a murderer, no more than the poet can help the inspiration to sing... I was born with the Evil One standing as my sponsor beside the bed where I was ushered into the world, and he has been with me since."
–From the confessions of H. H. Holmes

Mansfield Howard, alias **H. M. Pratt, male human Tradesman 8:** CR 8; Medium-Size humanoid (5 ft. 7 in. tall): HD 8d6+8; hp 38; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13; Atk +5/+0 melee or +10/+5 ranged; SA Sneak attack +4d6; AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +9, Will +6; Str 9, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 20.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +7, Bluff +18, Diplomacy +22, Disable Device +8, Disguise+17, Forgery +8, Gather Information +16, Hide +13, Innuendo +10, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (anatomy) +10, Listen +14, Move Silently +13, Read Lips +10, Sense Motive +16, Spot +13, Profession (physician) +12; Improved Unarmed Strike, Skill Focus: Bluff, Skill Focus: Diplomacy, Skill Focus: Sense Motive.

H. H. Holmes has an erect, confidant carriage, blue eyes, chestnut hair, and full, almost feminine

lips. In his bowler, slick suit, and well-trimmed walrus mustache, Holmes presents a dapper figure. But his luck with the ladies has less to do with good looks than with an almost mesmerizing charisma. Sensational accounts would claim Holmes could hypnotize with a glance. Men were not immune. Many angry creditors were sent off with a smile on their faces and one of his prison guards was heard to say, "I like that man, even if he is a rascal." Holmes somehow manages to be everyone's friend and everyone's confidant without seeming phony.

Part of Holmes ability to charm comes from his skill at telling everyone what they want to hear. Holmes is an expert at reading people and is so flawless a liar that Matthew Pinkerton wrote in his book, *Murder in All Ages* (1898), "With him, lying assumed the form of art..." Holmes is like a master juggler, capable of keeping dozens of lies and schemes in the air at a time.

Behind his charm and beneath the lies lurks a cold, calculating intelligence capable of extreme cruelty and sadism without remorse, guilt, or hesitation. Holmes' evil actions are rooted in greed and a deeply psychopathic mind. Holmes finds great pleasure in the fear and suffering of others and he relishes moment when life leaves his victims. His interest in anatomy drives him to dissect and experiment with many of his victims, both when they are alive and after their deaths. Holmes kills all kinds but takes special joy in killing women. Most men are safe from him as long as they don't threaten any of Holmes' plans and there is little Homes will gain from their deaths. Women whose deaths will profit Holmes are living on borrowed time.

Holmes avoids physical confrontations of any kind and prefers to trick his victims into dangerous situations or take them unawares. He has years of practice stalking silently into rooms with a drug-soaked rag, and he often kills by the twist of a distant valve. Holmes is careful about whom he chooses as his victims, and tries to target only those who will not be missed or those for whom he can arrange a reason for their absence.

As tightly knit a group as the player characters are, none of them are likely to be the target of Holmes' homicidal mania. If they are, it will probably be a lethal encounter. Holmes is careful and cunning, and he makes few mistakes. More likely, someone the PCs know will be Holmes' victim and investigation will eventually bring Holmes and the PCs together. Holmes will try to talk his way out of any physical confrontation and use his silver tongue to convince any NPCs nearby to side with him. If parlay and allies fail, Holmes will flee and disappear into a crowd, using his Disguise skill to become just another body among many. Once his crimes are discovered, Holmes takes no second chances. He will assume a new identity and leave town.

FORBIDDEN LORE

Holmes is a wholly human monster and an irredeemably evil being. The Red Death has had little to do with making Holmes the horror he is; Holmes is just one of those people who inexplicably come to embody all the darkest parts of human nature. Though the Red Death did not create Holmes, it is still very interested in his dark deeds. Twice the Red Death has approached Holmes in an effort to secure him as an agent of evil and both times Holmes went into a state of catatonia when presented with proof of the supernatural. Afterward Holmes was unable to recall the meetings and assumed that he had somehow dozed off. Holmes simply does not believe in spirits, God, the devil, or anything beyond normal human experience and has a powerful phobia of anything that he cannot explain away as a hoax or through some process of science. Proof of the supernatural would mean that Hell might exist, and Hell is not something Holmes likes to contemplate.

So the Red Death has had to simply observe Holmes and be happy with the evil he commits. Sometimes the Red Death arranges for Holmes to come into contact with individuals that threaten it or its minions but usually that is as far as its manipulation of Holmes goes.

Benjamin Pitezel, male human Tradesman 5: CR 5; Medium-Size humanoid (6 ft. tall); HD 5d6 +20; hp 48; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12; Atk +6 melee; or +5 ranged; SA Sneak Attack +3d6; AL CN; SV Fort +5, Ref +6; Will +0; Str 17, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +5, Craft (carpentry) +6, Gather Information +4, Hide +5, Innuendo +7, Intimidate +9, Listen +2, Move Silently +5, Open Lock +8, Pick Pocket +10; Toughness x3.

Benjamin Pitezel would be a handsome man were it not for the air of the ne'er-do-well and stink of drink that constantly surrounds him. Six feet tall, muscular, broad of back, with large calloused hands, clean jaw, straight nose, and neatly trimmed mustache, Pitezel looks like the hero of a romance when sober and cleaned up but his good looks hide a weak mind and weaker will.

Pitezel is in Holmes' thrall. He doesn't suspect Holmes' dark

The accomplice: Benjamin Pitezel.

appetites, but he is deeply enmeshed in Holmes' various scams, schemes, and cons. This suits Pitezel's less-than-upright moral stature, and Pitezel happily acts as Holmes' strong arm when physical threats are necessary or when a scam goes sour. Although he takes pleasure in bullying others, Pitezel is not an evil man. Despite his shortcomings, he is a loving husband and a caring father, dedicated to bettering his family's lot in life. He fails so frequently, wasting money on liquor or gambling, because of shortsightedness and a sickness for alcohol. If PCs confront Holmes, they will likely find themselves facing Pitezel as well. Pitezel is as loyal to his employer as he is to his family.

Charles M. Chappell, male human Expert 1: CR 1; Medium-Size humanoid (5 ft. 5 in. tall); HD 1d6; hp 4; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11; Atk +2 melee; or +2 ranged; AL LN; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 10.

Skills and feats: Craft (taxidermy) +4, Craft (construction) +5, Disable Device +6, Profession(machinist) +5, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +5; Endurance, Run

Charles M. Chappell first came to work for Holmes in the fall of 1890. An experienced construction worker and mechanic, Chappell normally supports himself through contracted construction work, but finding himself out of work he took a job with Holmes as a handyman at the Castle. Chappell is an unremarkable-looking man with an insatiable curiosity about how things are constructed and how they work. It was this curiosity that caused him to learn about

Charles Chappell: Mounter of skeletons.

taxidermy and mounting human skeletons, and it was his curiosity and Holmes' charm that made Chappell consent to assembling the skeletons of Holmes' victims. Knowing Holmes as a doctor and physician, he assumes Holmes gets the bodies by lawful means for autopsy and learning purposes. Holmes pays him good money to articulate the skeleton and Chappell values his position in Holmes' employ greatly. He suspects nothing evil of Holmes and will react suspiciously and defensively if anyone seems too curious about Holmes, his job, or the Castle.

Pat Quinlan, Ghoul Sor4: CR 6; Medium-Size Undead (5 ft. 7 in. tall); HD 2d12 + 4d4; hp 25;Init +4 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+4 Dex, +2 natural); Atk bite + 6 melee (1d6+2 and paralysis)and 2 claws +1 melee (1d3+2 and paralysis); or +6 ranged; SA paralysis, create spawn; SQ undead, +2 turn resistance; AL CE; SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +9; Str 14, Dex 19, Con —, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 16.

Skills and Feats: Climb +7, Disguise +6, Escape Artist +9, Hide +9, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +7, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spot +7; Extend Spell, Multiattack, Toughness, Weapon Finesse (bite).

Spells Known (7,7,4): 0—*mage hand, open/close, daze, ray of frost, resistance, flare;* 1st-*change self, expeditious retreat, protection from good;* 2nd—*alter self.*

Pat Quinlan is a disgusting undead creature that acts as the eyes and ears of the Red Death and helps to orchestrate the Red Death's plans that involve Holmes. Quinlan was a Confederate soldier who took to grave robbing and stealing from the fallen after battles. On one dark night Quinlan encountered a pack of ghouls and was brought under the Red Death's sway. Quinlan was disgusted by the transformation of his body into his undead form and the Red Death cultivated Quinlan's disgust into hatred and used that hatred to grant Quinlan sorcerous powers. Quinlan used his magic to blend into human society and return to some semblance of a normal life. For a time he lived among people unmolested, secretly preying on

the homeless, but eventually the Red Death shortened Quinlan's leash and enlisted him to watch over Holmes.

Pat Quinlan avoids people and acts unsociable, casting his spells

Pat Quinlan: The Goulish Janitor.

when necessary and using his Disguise skill to hide his true nature. He works as the janitor at the Castle and knows its secrets as well as Holmes. Quinlan uses the Castle's features to kill victims to satisfy his hunger for human flesh and disposes those bits he does not consume using Holmes' means. Holmes knows nothing of Quinlan's true nature and would likely be reduced to catatonia if he did. Quinlan knows this and is careful to keep his feeding and other evidence of his true purpose at the Castle secret. Holmes regards Quinlan as a trusted servant and relies on him to do those things which he believes Pitezel might balk at. Quinlan is awed by Holmes' evil genius and secretly jealous of his charm—if he weren't so terrified of the Red Death, he would use his spells to take Holmes' life and form, and assume Holmes' role as king of the Nightmare Castle.

THE CASTLE

The Castle is 50 feet wide and 160 feet long with 63rd Street to the north and Wallace Street on the longer west side. The Wallace street side of the first floor has a restaurant, barber shop, bookstore, and entranceway to the apartments upstairs with Holmes' pharmacy at the corner. Holmes' pharmacy occupies the majority of the frontage on the 63rd Street side with a small jewelry shop occupying the rest of the space.

The second floor is a maze of twisted narrow halls, dead ends, false doors, and two stairways that lead nowhere. There are 35 rooms on this floor but some of them are perpetually locked or hidden behind secret doors. Sliding wall panels hide entrances to secret passages and spy cubbies. All the doors to the apartments can be locked from the outside and have hidden spyholes. Several rooms are sound-proofed, a few of the locked rooms are airtight, and all the apartments have holes somewhere in their walls, floor, or ceiling so that lethal gas can be pumped inside. There are also four sound-proofed, greased chutes hidden behind trapdoors or disguised as brick chimneys.

The third floor is nearly as maze-like as the second. The two dozen apartments are slightly larger and more comfortably appointed but no less deadly as those on the previous floor. There are secret crawlspaces and chutes as on the second floor but the more regular architecture here allows for fewer. This floor also holds Holmes' personal apartments and office. In a room off his office stands Holmes' walk-in safe and inside his apartment is a stove large enough to contain a body.

The basement holds the most obvious horrors. The basement can be entered only by a cramped staircase hidden behind locked doors on the second and third floors. It is cavernous, with dimensions of width and length equal to the building above. The whole basement is thickly walled so that no sound can escape. On the west side a locked chamber hides a pile of bones at the base of a greased chute. A noose hangs down into the tiny room from above. At other places there are holes in the ceiling for bodies to fall from the other chutes. Far to the south in the darkest reaches lie Holmes' murderous means of torture. There stand several cases of various surgical tools and a darkly stained wooden table upon which victims can be restrained. There is also a large rack-like device to tear people apart. To the side stand two vats of quicklime and a large vat of acid for the disposal of bodies. Bricked up in the east wall is the huge tank of poisonous gas Holmes uses to snuff the life from victims in the apartments upstairs. Finally, in the southeast corner stands the kiln Holmes uses to burn those parts of his victims the quicklime or acid cannot destroy.

***Acid Vat:** A PC who is put in the acid vat suffers 3d6 points of damage each round while in the vat and for two rounds after emerging. If a PC or NPC should take some of the acid to splash on someone, each splash causes 1d6 points of damage on the first round and an additional 1d6 on the second.

***Quicklime Vats:** The quicklime is slow acting and causes no damage on the first round of contact. A PC pushed in the quicklime or someone splashed with

quicklime powder takes 1d4 points of damage on the second round, and each round thereafter until the quicklime is brushed away. Brushing away quicklime allows the affected PC a Reflex save (DC 15). A successful save stops the damage the character would take each round. Brushing away quicklime does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

***Doors:** All the doors in Holmes' Castle should be considered strong wooden doors (hardness 5, hp 20, DC 25 to break). The locks in the Castle are of good quality (DC 28 to pick). The locks that Holmes uses to lock people inside their rooms can be picked only from the outside. Hidden peepholes can be found in the doors with a successful Search skill check (DC 25).

***Secret Doors:** Secret doors in the Castle require a successful Search skill check (DC 25) to locate and all are strong wooden doors with good locks.

***Secret Spy Holes**: In some rooms there are peepholes in the walls so that Holmes can spy on guests. These hidden spy ports can be located with a successful Search skill check (DC 25).

***Air-Tight Rooms:** Holmes rarely rents these small, coffin-like apartments unless he has a renter who comes in late and whom he decides to kill that very night. These rooms are also sound-proofed so Holmes sometimes locks victims inside and then watches from a spyhole as they panic and run out of air. A Listen skill check (DC 30) is required to hear anything from within these rooms. The doors to the airtight apartments are especially stout (hardness 5, hp 30, DC 28 to break). The rooms have enough air for one character to breathe for two hours. At the end of that time a PC in the room can hold her breath for a number of rounds equal to twice her Constitution score. After this period of time the character must make a Constitution check (DC 10) each round to continue holding her breath. Each round the DC increases by 1. When the character fails her Constitution check, she falls unconscious (0 hp). In the following round, she drops to -1 hit points and is dying. The round after that, she dies. Characters who fall asleep in the airtight chamber have a chance of awakening before their air runs out. A PC can make a Constitution check (DC 20) to awaken at the end of the two hours and then hold her breath. If the PC Fails the save to awaken she falls unconscious and begins to die. Being trapped in the airtight rooms when the air has run out is a CR 10 trap.

***Poison Gas**: Holmes can gas particular rooms in his Castle by means of valves hidden in his apartments (Search check DC 25 to locate). He usually waits until victims are asleep as the gassing rooms are not soundproofed and choking victims might alert other visitors. Sleeping victims are allowed a Listen check (DC 25) to hear the gas jets in their sleep and a Constitution check (DC 20) to awaken on the first round the gas takes effect (suffering 1d6 Constitution damage before awakening). Awakened characters can attempt to hold their breath. On the first round of breathing gas it causes 1d6 Constitution damage. On the next round and each round thereafter it causes an additional 2d6 Constitution damage. Being trapped in a gassed apartment is a CR 10 trap.

***Walk-In Safe:** Holmes sometimes traps people in his walk-in safe. Characters trapped inside have four hours of air and then must follow the same mechanic as the air-tight room trap. The iron door is almost impossible to force open (DC 35) and difficult to damage (hardness 10, 80 hp).The lock can be picked from the outside with a successful Open Lock check (DC 30). The safe is not soundproof (though it does muffle sound), but the room is (Listen check DC 30 to hear sounds from within or beyond the walls). A Spot check (DC 15) inside the safe allows a character to notice two small dents in the door where one of Holmes' victims pressed so hard against the iron that she left the marks of her palms. Being trapped in the safe is a CR 10 trap.

***Kiln:** Holmes sometimes renders victims unconscious with chloroform then chains them up and places them in his kiln in the basement to burn them alive. The kiln causes 4d6 points of damage each round. A chained victim must make an Escape Artist check (DC 20) or break the chains (DC 26) in order to attempt to escape the kiln on the following round. Escaping the kiln requires the character to force open the kiln door (DC 20). Any character escaping the kiln is on fire and must take efforts to put out the flame or take damage as described on page 86 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Being trapped in the kiln is a CR 10 trap.

***Greased Chute:** A character falling or pushed into a grease chute takes 3d6 points of damage from a fall from the second floor and 4d6 points of damage from a fall from the third floor. PCs may

make a Reflex save (DC 17) to slow themselves in the chute and take half damage. If Holmes or Quinlan manages to somehow put the noose around a PC and push them in the chute, that character suffers and additional 2d6 damage from the fall and must make a Constitution check each round (initially DC 15, increasing in difficulty by 1 each round) or be reduced to 0 hit points and -1 on the following round. On the third round hanging from the noose the PC dies. This also could be considered a CR 10 trap.

***Dissection Table:** Victims tied the table can make an Escape Artist check (DC 20) or break the bonds (DC 20).

***Elasticity Determinator:** PCs chained to the rack can make an Escape Artist check (DC 20) or break the chains (DC 26) to escape. The rack causes 1d6 hit points of damage with each turn of the winch (turning the winch once is a standard action). Unless a Fortitude save is made (DC 10 initially, increasing by 1 with each turn of the winch) the rack also causes 1d3 Strength damage with each turn.

***Chloroform:** Holmes often uses a chloroform-soaked rag to render victims unconscious. In order to do so, Holmes must make a successful grapple attack and hold his victim. Instead of dealing damage, Holmes applies the chloroform-soaked rag to his victim's mouth and nose. Flat-footed opponents must immediately make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or be reduced to 0 hit points. Other opponents may hold their breath for up to a number of rounds equal to double their Constitution while they attempt to break Holmes' grapple. Every round that Holmes grapples and holds his opponent and that opponent is not holding her breath, she must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or be reduced to 0 hit points.

USING H. H. HOLMES IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

All the suggestions below can be complicated by using Chappell, Quinlan, and Pitezel as red herrings to throw the PCs off Holmes' trail. Quinlan is a horror who has preyed on humanity for longer than Holmes, but Holmes should be the true villain in any adventure involving him. While Quinlan is an evil undead that lives off the flesh of the living, Holmes is despicably human and takes great pleasure from causing fear, pain, and death wherever he may.

* The PCs arrive at Chicago to attend to business at the World's Fair only to find that the rooms they arranged to have waiting for them have been rented to another. Someone posing as them arrived earlier that day and canceled the reservations. With nowhere else to go, they come across an advertisement for Holmes' "World's Fair Hotel." The Red Death has arranged for the PCs to cross Holmes' path in an effort to be rid of them. Investigation reveals someone matching Quinlan's description arranged for their rooms to be rented.

*A long-time friend the PCs were supposed to meet at the World's Fair goes missing. They were to meet to discuss dangerous information and suspicion naturally falls on the PCs' enemies. Holmes chose the friend as a victim and the association with the PCs is a coincidence.

*The PCs discover Quinlan's undead nature after Holmes flees Chicago. In return for his life, Quinlan puts the PCs on Holmes' trail. The PCs must follow Holmes' path of villainy across the country and participate in the ill-fated race to save the Pitezel children.

*The Red Death arranges for several of the PCs' acquaintances to die at Holmes' hands. Investigation finally leads them to the Castle and Holmes, and they confront and kill the madman. The Red Death arranged this so that he could transform Holmes into a mohrg (see the *Monster Manual*, page 137) and finally bring his evil genius under control.

*Holmes fakes his death by the hangman's noose. He is contacted by Quinlan during his imprisonment and informed of Quinlan's undead nature. Through Quinlan, the Red Death offers to free him in exchange for servitude and Holmes agrees. Quinlan uses his magic to appear to be Holmes and is hanged in his place. Holmes makes his strange funerary arrangements in order to prevent Quinlan from rising from the grave and ensuring Holmes keeps up his end of the bargain.

*The characters enter into a business deal and are conned somehow by Holmes. Perhaps Holmes sells them a building or rents them a place he does not own. When they come to accuse him, Holmes tells them some plausible lie or excuse and offers to put them up in his hotel until the misunderstanding can be worked out. Of course, Holmes has no intention of making good on his deal. He sets the PCs up in separate rooms and tries to eliminate them one by one.

Teamwork: How to get it and use it

BY MATT HANCOCK ILLUSTRATIONS BY VINCE LOCKE

DM: *A large troll steps from the shadows, challenging the party.*
Reave: *I charge the troll with my greatsword!*
Sweetleaf: *How far is the troll from me?*
DM: *The troll is 70 feet from you, but...*
Sweetleaf: *Great! I* fireball *it!*
DM: *Okay... Reave, as you reach the troll you are engulfed by flames.*
Reave: *That's just great. Hey, Sweetleaf, how am I supposed to fight a troll with only two hit points?*
Sweetleaf: *Uh...*

Perhaps the most important quality of a successful roleplaying group is teamwork. Teamwork needs to exist, not only between characters but between players as well. Bad teamwork in game can result in the death of some or all of the characters; bad teamwork out of game can result in the death of the campaign. For a team to make full use of its members' myriad abilities requires one thing: trust. Once the characters begin to trust each other they will be more forthcoming with their abilities and more willing to rely on each other in dangerous situations. DMs can do a lot to facilitate and encourage the evolution of teamwork, and they can also do a lot to destroy it.

Teamwork starts at the beginning of the character creation process. The DM should encourage players to work together when developing their character concepts. Nothing promotes party unity like the players having their characters knowing, or even being related to, each other before the adventure begins. If the players are unwilling or unable to work together before the start of the game, the DM still needs to monitor the character creation process to ensure that the characters at least stand a chance at working together. It is a terrible feeling when a group of players get together for their first session and for reasons of alignment, or class, or history, two or more players discover that their characters are incapable of getting along.

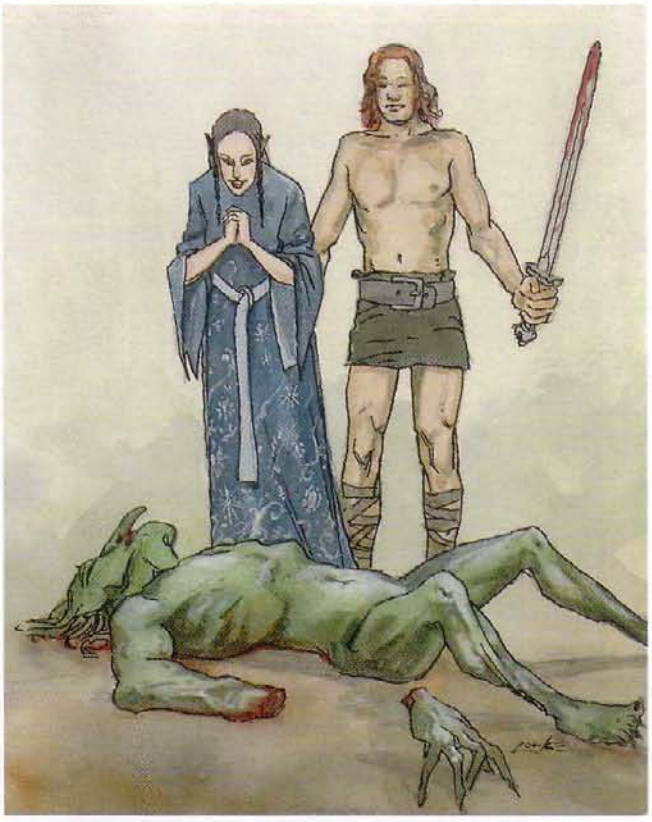
As a general rule of thumb, DMs should discourage characters who cannot get along with another character type. For example, a player who wants to play a barbarian who kills all spellcasters on sight will, at best, curtail the class options for the rest of the party, and at worst, end the campaign almost as soon as it begins. This is not to say that the DM should summarily disallow the barbarian. Instead try to moderate the hatred the character has for spellcasters. A barbarian who distrusts or dislikes spellcasters but recognizes their value can be a source of excellent roleplaying opportunities (Barbarian: *"I don't need the help of some spindly hand waver!"* Wizard: *"That's not what you said when I increased your Strength so you could fight the giant last week."* Barbarian: *"(mumble, grumble)...oh, be quiet").*

DM Tips: Once the campaign has begun, the party needs to feel like a group rather than a collection of individuals. Once this happens they will fight better together, create more roleplaying opportunities for each other, and generally have a better time. Normally, this sense of camaraderie develops over time as the characters get to know each other and their role within the party. However, sometimes it just doesn't happen, or is slow in happening, and the DM needs to encourage a sense of togetherness. Here are some tips to get the ball rolling:

1. **Create a common foe:** If the players are having problems with each other, give them someone else to worry about. Someone memorable. Create a recurring NPC that the players can really hate, and really enjoy hating. Make the NPC too powerful (physically, intellectually, or materially) for any one character to handle of their own and watch the PCs work together like never before.
2. **Have the party name itself:** If the PCs are just a collection of individuals who have little to do with each other and you would like to see more group cohesion, have the players think of a name for their party. Try to be subtle when you broach the idea of an adventuring name to your PCs so that it feels like a natural evolution ("the clerk behind the desk tells you that you are required to provide a name for your adventuring band in order to register with the guild"). A party name will have two obvious effects upon the PCs. First, the PCs will be forced to analyze themselves, and what they do, to come up with a name ("we seem to fight a lot of undead, so how about we call ourselves the Crypt Walkers?"). This introspection leads to a better sense of the party as a whole rather than just each character's contribution to it. Second, a name creates a sense of belonging between party members. Even a character who is often at odds with the other characters is still a member of the group ("he may be a pain in the butt, but he's the *Crypt Walkers'* pain in the butt").
3. **Create a friendly rivalry between players:** Have the PCs compete over something, whether it is the affection of an NPC, or the most number of orcs killed during a battle. A friendly rivalry gives characters something in common that encourages them to work together and help each other. ("No one's going to kill my friend!" cried Cyynan. "At least not while he is beating me in orcs killed!") Remember to keep the rivalry friendly, otherwise players will end up sabotaging each other and therefore the rest of the party.
4. **Make certain that all players can contribute to the adventure:** Encourage teamwork by making certain that all of the players' abilities are needed to complete the adventure. Give the players encounters that allow them to use their abilities to their fullest. Not in every encounter, of course, but mix up the adventure so that all of the players feel necessary. For example, in order to rescue a hostage the bard uses his skills to find his location, the ranger scouts the location, the thief leads the break-in, the druid calms the watchdogs, the warriors fight through the guards, and the wizard breaks down the spells trapping the hostage. Things don't always go this smoothly and player skills tend to overlap, but it is a good model.
5. **Isolate problem characters:** If two characters are not getting along, another trick is to isolate them in a situation in which they are forced to rely on each other. The characters could wash up together on an island, or be separated together from the rest of the party. Design the encounters so that it will take the skills of both characters to survive. If the characters survive, and they should, they will have an experience between them that is unique to them, and this creates a bond. There are two things to keep in mind when using this technique. The first is that it may not work. The characters could refuse to work together and die, or come out of the experience hating each other even more. The second thing to keep in mind is to ensure that the other players and the campaign don't suffer while you do this. Try to make certain that the other players have something to do while you're working with the smaller group.

Teamwork can prevent arguments around the gaming table.

Player Tips: Once the characters trust and know each other it is time to put that teamwork to practical use. The most obvious place for PCs to put their newfound



teamwork to work is in combat. The PCs will be amazed at how smoothly combat goes once they stop getting in each other's way. The following tips, useful in the midst of a fight, should keep things moving smoothly.

1. **Know your comrades:** In combat it is important to know your enemies. It is equally important to know your allies, as well. If you know how the other party members are going to react to a given situation you can plan your actions according to what they are going to do, even if surprised. For example, if the wizard in the party often begins combat with big damage spells, the fighters might just hold their actions until the wizard's initiative before they act to avoid any area spells.
2. **Know what your comrades have:** Every character needs their secrets. It is, however, a good idea to know who is carrying all the healing potions or who is carrying the *+3 sword* in case an iron golem should happen by. Otherwise, this simple omission of knowledge can lead to trouble. For example, a character is dying and the party has used all of their magical healing; the *potion of cure light wounds* that the character has hidden in her pack is not going to do her much good.
3. **Set up specific responses to specific situations:** Adaptability is key in any combat situation in which the opponents can widely vary, such as in a dungeon. It can require costly rounds to switch strategies against the opponents, unless the PCs have pre-existing strategies for common situations. For example, if party is mobbed by a horde of kobolds, the fighters pull back to protect the spellcasters, who begin lobbing area spells without having to worry about hurting the fighters. If the party is attacked by a creature that is unaffected by magic, the spellcasters move away from the fighters to give them room to fight and cast magic such as *bull's strength* and *magic weapon* to improve the fighters' abilities.

Teamwork does more than just improve the characters' combat ability—it also creates opportunities for roleplaying. Characters become more than just travel companions and artillery support, they also become friends. When characters become friends, events begin to mean more. When the sophisticated noble is humiliating the unsophisticated ranger PC, the noble wizard PC can't simply laugh at his misfortune, anymore. After all, that isn't just any ranger from the back woods. That ranger is a Crypt Walker.

DM: *A large troll steps from the shadows, challenging the party.*
Reave: *I ready my greatsword and move to protect the wizard!*
Sweetleaf: *How far is the troll from the party?*
DM: *Now that Reave has moved back, you can see that the troll is about 70 feet away.*
Sweetleaf: *Great! I* fireball *it!*
DM: *The flames engulf the troll, which blindly charges forward to strike the source of its pain.*
Reave: *I use my readied action to strike the troll before it can get to Sweetleaf.*
Sweetleaf: *Thanks, Reave. Hold it off for one more round and I should be able to drop it with a* flame arrow...

Though we spend a good deal of time experimenting on the brains of circus monkeys. . .

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ELMINSTER'S

A WAYFARERS GUIDE TO THE FORGOTTEN REALMS®

BY ED GREENWOOD

They say there are caravans that went into Owlhold twenty summers ago, and haven't found their ways out yet. After seeing the lanes thereabouts, I can well believe it.

Ghuldribrand Mroster
Mage Royal of Zindalankh
In coversation with Volo
Year of the Arch

Our tour this month looks at the closest thing the Border Kingdoms have to a forgotten backwater—and why such places can be so dangerous.

OWLHOLD

Since the long-ago loss of Bloutar to the neighboring Barony of Blacksaddle, there's been nothing approaching even a hamlet in the little-known land of Owlhold. Only lone inns, steadings, and the occasional waystables with a pump and a serving-shed tavern now dot this wooded land.

Almost as thickly forested as the Qurth Forest it was once a part of, Owlhold is a rolling, many-ridged land of hedges, vines, hanging moss, and everpresent shade. Mosses cloak rocks and treetrunks thickly, the air is damp, and treacherous bogs are everywhere. Nameless lanes wind and often plunge through this leafy landscape, leading the traveler astray and never offering signboard, landmark, or even an open meadow in which to get one's bearings.

There are legends of entire caravans being swallowed up in the green, tangled heart of Owlhold and lost forever—and at least two of these tales are true. Bogs and brigands are the real perils of Owlhold, because the keen-eyed bowmen whose arrows find the eyes and throats of many drovers are the good citizens of Owlhold, who strike down only those who serve them ill, or pray to evil gods, or trade in slaves.

The Owlen are quiet, simple folk who live with the land rather than endlessly striving to conquer it. They are adept at melting away from needless trouble, and many a loud or aggressive group of intruders has stormed into an Owlen home in search of food or shelter or directions—only to find it deserted, the snuffed candles still smoldering and back doors standing open. The steaders haven't gone far, though; anyone foolish enough to pillage, vandalize, or set fire to homes in such a situation will attract swift, plentiful, and deadly volleys of arrows from the surrounding trees.

Elves and half-elves are plentiful in Owlhold, as are folk of all sorts on the run from elsewhere—and, of course, owls. The owls hunt the small scurrying things that are so plentiful here because folk don't try to poison them to protect farm crops; instead, they pluck medicinal mosses and herbs, and berries for the making of throat-scorching wines, and sell these to—or swap them for food with—the few traders who do venture into Owlhold.

LOST OELERHODE

Owlhold is the "Forgotten Land" of the Forgotten Realms for a good reason: of old (thousands of years ago), this was the heart of Oelerhode, a gnome kingdom that grew as proud and foolish as Netheril or any other doomed and decadent elven or human realm. Domed houses of stone were built and rebuilt, rearing ever higher above conical stone waymarkers and walled gardens.

The citizenry pushed back the elven forest on all sides with almost as much vigor as they tunneled into the ground after the plentiful gems, making for themselves foes as fierce as any aggressive human realm. Their delvings enriched the Oeler gnomes even as they laid bare deeper caverns with their own dark inhabitants, who were slain or driven deeper only with the loss of much blood.

And then the orcs came. Sweeping down from the north in an endless, reaving flood of blood-drenched blades and roaring cruelty, they swept over Oelerhode as a great wave scours a coastal village and sweeps away all. In a tenday, a proud kingdom became a shattered, plundered open grave, abandoned to vultures and beasts who dine on carrion as the orcs swept on south, never to return.

The forest reclaimed Oelerode, burying riven domes and fallen waycones as it cloaked everything in green and growing things, obliberating proud gnome-work with seeming eagerness.

The surviving Oeler gnomes could literally be counted on the hands of a few men. Dazed and in some cases lost in grieving madness, they wandered away or fled headlong; those who remained in their mind-dreams or in desperate attempts to salvage prized treasures were slain by all manner of prowling scavengers, until no one remained who could recall clearly who had dwelt where, or what grandeur must lurk under this shoulder of moss or that thicket.

Some lost cellars of riches

are, of course, rumored to remain in overgrown Owlhold today, along with strange creatures who love to lair in dark, undisturbed peace. The Owlen tend to leave such places alone for foolish outlanders to face dangers in, but always know of a few "safe" cellars or caverns nearby to retreat to, or store things in hiding, or for children to play in.

DANGER CLOAKED, UNSLEEPING

Formidable brigand or adventurer invasions stir local Owlen to call on the most mighty inhabitants of Owlhold: the many outlawed adventurers, renegade mages who dwell here in seclusion to study and experiment (often using roofless gnome granary-caverns as spellhurling chambers), and undead who linger among collected, powerful magics of fallen lands.

This last grim category of Owlhold's defenders includes Ongolym Nlerreth, an archlich who commands spells untold and a means of casting them before battle into a huge, swirling, rainbow-hued sphere of force that he can guide into foes, or hurl spells forth from in stabbing rays, at will. Ongolym sometimes rides a tiny Netherese airship (capable of flying four large humans, or six if two cling to hold-bars and dangle from the tail) into battle, accompanied, if he desires, by a handful of flying golems.

His most powerful counterpart is Baeremyl Clathaderra, a lady watchghost who guards nine enchanted blades forged for the heroes of fallen Helbrester (a city now sunken beneath the waves of the Sea of Swords, that once rose proud over the now-pirate-infested Nelanther). She likes to see these swords used in battle from time to time, and will lend them to living adventurers for use in a specific combat.

Baeremyl can animate all of the blades to fly at and threaten anyone who fails to return a blade she has lent them, and can by the same means prevent a blade from obeying the person holding it, no matter how strong they may be.

Various magical rings and wands float inside Baeremyl's ghostly body, flickering and pulsing as they are awakened—and by some eldritch, now-forgotten magic, she can cause their power to flow to her fingertips and mouth, to burst forth at her command. Their awakened powers wink within her like individual swirling sparks, not a visible path of power, so their emission can be a surprise to those she sends them against.

Even most Owlen fear such champions, however, and are content to use their bows, and the skills of a few adventuring bands who've settled in Owlhold, against most challenges from "the Wild Outside." Most wayfarers who blunder through Owlhold will come away thinking it's a nigh-deserted forest land, too rugged to be worth clearing but drenched in wild beauty. They'll find it hard to believe that archliches and mighty mages dwell unseen in the green fastnesses they're so thankful to have found their ways out of.

NO MAPS TO PEER AT

Maps of the Border Kingdoms show the major roads crossing Owlhold readily enough, but the traveler using those routes will discover that the maps ignore the many twists and even loops the real roads make—and that no better maps are available. Owlhold is unknown territory; even lifelong Owlen tend to know only a small area intimately, and beyond it, the courses of a few streams and rivers (the trails one can't get lost on) well.

Most, however, can tell a lost wayfarer the approximate direction of (not distance to) most inns and taverns, and roughly in what sequence these will be found along a major route. Only Owlen and veteran peddlers can unfold an accurate roll of wayhavens, but a beginning can be made, as evidenced hereafter.

"Anyone foolish enough to pillage, vandalize, or set fire to homes will attract swift, plentiful, and deadly volleys of arrows from the surrounding trees."

The road between Oeble and Bloutar (known locally as the Green Road) skirts Owlhold proper, and is readily and openly traveled. Travelers often become lost on Longcrag Ride, the perilous, winding trail that connects the midpoint of the Green Road with the route between Talduth Vale and Beldargan (known locally as the Bowshot).

Proper inns stand at either end of the Bowshot, where it meets the other roads. At its north end is The Four Stags (Good/Expensive), a bustling place with spit-sizzling hearths at either end of a long, usually-crowded common room, and sheds where one can rent a secure "long stall" for one's intact team and wagon to be driven into, settled for the night, and then driven out the other end of, come morning.

The Stags is where many Owlen come to trade goods with passing merchants, hire companionship, and see all they desire to of the wider world. It's an interesting place.

More of green and mysterious Owlhold next issue.

Tying the Knot

BY SIMON TAYLOR

Having just looked at birth, it's time to tackle another big life theme—weddings. My own wedding was in August and the amount of preparation and work required was incredible. Fairly early on it occurred to me that a wedding is a perfect setting for a roleplaying scenario. Bear in mind that not only do you have all of the pomp and circumstance associated with the wedding itself but you also have all the relatively mundane organization to make it run smoothly. Player characters can just as easily get involved with the latter as the former. When you roll in the amount of tradition involved with weddings you have a custom-made plot generator.

WILL YOU MARRY ME?

A modern plot, much used and abused, is the idea of a character marrying for political expediency or some other gain. The film *Green Card* is an obvious example. Now suppose one of your player characters was in that position. Perhaps they've been banished from a country for some inappropriate act and the only way to counteract the banishment (or extradition) is to marry a native of the country concerned. First of all, how are they going to find somebody to take them? Secondly, how are they going to avoid being found out? Finally, and most importantly, how are they going to cope with the demands of a marriage they're probably not terribly comfortable with while pursuing the kind of hectic life we associate with your average player character? This is an ideal way to introduce a recurring NPC into your campaign who can be used in a variety of ways depending upon the tone of your campaign. Perhaps they're comic relief as the essentially indestructible annoying NPC, or perhaps they're simply there as a brake on some of the more outrageous plans of the PCs. Maybe the PCs will even grow to love them, allowing the campaign to evolve into a mature, sensitive campaign with living, breathing characters.

THE WEDDING PRESENT

A gift at a wedding has a certain power. Wedding gifts are often treasured items, kept as precious memories of a wonderful day. If that gift has other powers—real, tangible powers—it changes the whole meaning of the gift. The gift could be intended for ill or fair reasons. Here's an example of the former: A Welsh Love Spoon with elaborate, but indistinct, carving on the handle is presented to the happy couple on their wedding day. The giver is unknown. The carvings slowly and imperceptibly transform into a more distinct shape. Possibilities include:

- The shapes transform into dancing figures, which slowly summon dark young of Shub-Niggurath.
- The shapes transform into an image of the Green Man, one of the many forms of Nyarlathotep. The owner of the spoon is drawn to the site of the Green Man's imprisonment—Stonehenge—and is compelled to destroy the stones to release him.
- The shapes transform into a depiction of a yew tree with markings on its bark representing the Ogham letter, Idho—both evil omens in Celtic times, often symbolizing death. Life becomes a misery for the newlyweds unless the spoon, and the curse, is passed on.

It is obviously possible to translate this scenario into a setting other than *Call of Cthulhu*. It is also possible to change the gift. The essential idea stays the same.

MARRIED IN WHITE – YOU'VE CHOSEN ALL RIGHT

My wife had her dress specially made because she wanted the

perfect design (including theatre masks and pen and quill—she decided against my suggestion to include dice!). There are lots of myths relating to wedding dresses and all of them give us a basis on which to build roleplaying scenarios. Here are some ideas for just a few of them:

- The groom is not allowed to see the bride in her dress until the wedding day, lest bad luck befall the couple. Suppose he did. How would the bad luck manifest itself? Would the groom be desperate to cover up the fact he's seen the dress so as not to alarm his wife to be? Could this lead to problems of its own? In a devoutly superstitious setting the groom could be forced to all kinds of extremes.
- Different cultures have different traditions when it comes to wedding dresses and, in particular, color. Western Christian tradition "insists" on white to represent virginity, whilst in Roman times brides always wore yellow. But in Gypsy traditions, red is worn on the wedding day when it, too, symbolizes virginity. The confusion that could arise because of these differences is great.
- Suppose the wedding dress was made of some wondrous material. Imagine if the dress itself had powers beyond your wildest dreams. Suppose the material was cursed. All of these possibilities exist in the fevered imaginations of roleplaying game designers! The one I favor is the dress made of silk obtained from Atlach-Nacha, the Cthulhuesque spider beast from one of Clark Ashton Smith's bizarre stories—would the dress drag the bride, and indeed the entire congregation, into the Dreamlands?

I TAKE THEE..... ERRR, WHAT'S YOUR NAME AGAIN?

History and indeed modern life is filled with tales of arranged marriages and politically expedient marriages. Whilst I don't wish to get into a moral discussion of the rights and wrongs of this system—particularly as it is still practiced extensively today—I do want to address the roleplaying possibilities. Let's take a fantasy environment. The elven princess, Llandryss Moonstorm, is forced into marriage with human King Hector le Savage to seal a political treaty between two nations.

If that wedding gift has other powers—real, tangible powers—it changes the whole meaning of the gift.

The first meeting of these lovers-to-be takes place at the wedding. Now suppose beautiful Princess Moonstorm is also a ferociously independent spirit and doesn't take so kindly to being manipulated in this fashion. Suppose she doesn't like King Hector and decides that it would be better all round if she decapitates him as soon as he tries to "seal the pact" in the wedding bed. So much for the treaty! This is an extreme example. Much more fun can be had with a marriage that takes place but leaves both parties upset and aggrieved at their treatment as pawns in a political game. Now, if the PCs were aligned to either of these factions and they had to ensure that the pact stayed solid imagine the fun you could have if either bride or groom decided they preferred to find "satisfaction" in another's arms? Imagine if the preferred partner was a PC....

WHERE'S THE BAND?

Whilst weddings can be big dramatic events, and whilst emotions are usually to the fore and tradition has a big say in the progress of the day, we must never forget the mundane tasks. There has to be a band, and transport, and special clothes, and catering, and a church, and pictures, and invites and... the list is endless. Somebody has to be responsible for organizing all of these events. Your initial response may be that this is dull. Why should you get the PCs involved in this kind of mundane activity? Well, one of the major factors in making a scenario work is to ensure that the flavor of the surroundings is right. You must give the PCs a reason for getting involved in your plot lines.

Suppose they are employed to organize a particular aspect of a royal wedding. They are mixing with powerful people, they have an absolute urgency to get things right, they must locate the right people, they must ensure they are capable of performing the task, and they must ensure everything runs smoothly. As soon as you throw a spanner into the works, such as the master musician they need going missing, you have an incentive and a motivation for them to bite onto your tasty plot line. Combine this with the constant background buzz associated with the other preparations for the wedding and you have a scenario that will live long in the memory.

That's all for this month. We've only just scratched the surface of the potential for scenarios revolving around weddings. For now, though, I'm traversing the Styx and will be addressing the third in the mighty life triumvirate next issue—Death.

CAN OGRES FLY?

A PREVIEW OF ARCANUM

BY IAN RICHARDS

The idea of playing an RPG on the home computer has firmly established itself with the core gamer, even becoming a mundane part of our shared hobby. Regardless, the news of Troika/Sierra Studios' newest game, *Arcanum* (due in "early 2001"), really caught the eye. A steampunk epic in the graphic tradition of *Warcraft* or *Starcraft*? A successor for the hugely popular and excellent RPG game engine from Interplay designed by part of the hugely successful team that put together the classic *Fallout*? I hoped the game would provide all this and more.

Arcanum promises a fantasy world in which technology arose where once only magic held sway. Where electricity has been harnessed by the common man, causing new tensions with the wizards whose power has now become somewhat pedestrian. With more than 300 NPCs and over 250 different types of monsters to kill, *Arcanum* offers a huge world. The low-end technology puts a new spin on things, giving gamers something they've never seen before.

The very concept of mixing fantasy with Victorian-era technology made me eager to break into the packaging and bang the CD into the computer. Sure, it was just a preview disk—a few locations from the alpha build of the game—but it was enough to give me an insight into the world of *Arcanum*. At least that's what the guys at Sierra promised.

I couldn't wait.

I didn't mind that the preview didn't come with instructions or information on who, what, where, and when. I don't usually bother with that stuff anyway, so why bother now? True to form, I booted up and fiddled around with the game's interface, which proved surprisingly simple. There was no new rocket science to the controls, and a few buttons or controls didn't seem to do anything, but since the game isn't even finished yet, I didn't see it as much as a problem. I suppose I'll have to await the game's proper release to satisfy my curiosity and eventually

Explore the gaslit streets and forlorn crash sites of a Victorian fantasy world in *Arcanum*.

succumb to reading the manual.

Character creation is superb, with background histories containing "trade offs" that add a sense of individuality. Trade offs, you ask? With every background comes a positive and negative benefit. The bigger the bonus, the bigger the penalties. My ogre may have been ugly, stupid, and unlikely to make any friends, but with the increase in strength that came with the personal deficiencies, most fights promised to be relatively short. All of the expected character races are represented, just as if I was playing DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®. Elves, dwarves, humans, gnomes, half-orcs. . . oh, and my half-ogre. I was beginning to feel right at home. The game was beginning to feel more and more like *Castle Falkenstien*.

The setting itself looked much like *Baldur's Gate*, but a little more crude (probably because this wasn't the finished program). The opening movie had me onboard a huge blimp doomed to crash as a couple of suicidal ogres in World War I-style planes rattled off a few well-placed rounds into the engines and canopy.

So. . . can ogres fly?

Yes, but not very well, as one promptly proved as it took a dive straight into the blimp's propellers and disintegrated. Doomed, we dropped all too quickly toward the Stonewall Mountains. And so the adventure began. The whole opening movie was designed as if filmed in atmospheric black and white by an early 20th Century cinematic cameraman. Cool, even down to the authentic sounds.

I was so impressed by the opening movie that the actual game proved a little disappointing. My muscle-bound ogre/mountain in a tux got to run around the crash site on a scrolling, three-quarter-view landscape with *Diablo*-esque area borders—nothing new or exciting, here. The graphics aren't as good as *Baldur's Gate II*, and I quickly got fed up hitting wolves (the only "monsters" I encountered before my first program crash). Talking to various NPCs led to a lot of story development, though, which I found very cool. One of my fellow passengers almost survived (why am I feeling a little like Bruce Willis?) and managed to croak just as he imparted some world-destroying information, getting me into no end of trouble. Thanks! Shortly thereafter, I encountered a delusional priest who saw the crash and though I was the reincarnated image of a god so popular he had difficulty remembering his name. Trust me, if that god was as ugly as my ogre, you probably wouldn't forget him.

With these encounters, the game really seemed like role-playing—lots of information to be gained if you talk to everyone, even if they have the wits of a baboon (as if my character is one to talk!). This roleplaying-heavy environment reminded me of *Planescape: Torment*, in a good way.

Though I only got to fiddle with an extremely unfinished game, I did see enough to decide that I'll be buying and playing the whole thing upon its release. The setting is certainly diverse enough to have me hooked. The look and feel of the game play isn't anything ground-breaking, though, just more of the same with a few nice tweaks. Overall? It doesn't look to be quite as good as *Baldur's Gate II*, but it seems much better than fair and is worthy of a closer look.

Thieves in the Forest

The second in Atlas Games' *Penumbra* line of d20 modules, John Nephew's 1st-level adventure *Thieves in the Forest* takes a frustrating leap backwards from the innovation and "gee whiz" factor of its predecessor (John Tynes' *Three Days to Kill*). That scenario turned the classic D&D® adventure on its head by ascribing immoral goals to the PCs by sending them on a mob hit against a bandit lord. It was dark, fresh, and wholly unlike anything anyone would expect from the long tradition of namby-pamby TSR-generated adventures of the past. While *Thieves in the Forest* benefits from tighter rules than *Three Days to Kill* (mostly due to the fact that it was written after the Third Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®/d20 rules were finalized), there are no flourishes here. This is a standard "go out and kill some bad guys because you're good, and that's what good people do" scenario.

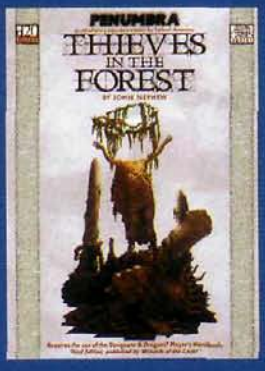
Once you've read the adventure's title, you've got a pretty fair idea of how the proceedings will go. The action centers around the dirt-poor village of Brandon's Bridge, a secluded hamlet nestled in a large forest. The villagers have been losing caravans to a local gang of thieves recently, and opening "boxed text" places the party on the outskirts of town, ready to venture into the forest and kick some bandit booty. Nephew as much as admits that this is a lame "non-hook" that won't work to get any but the most altruistic adventurers in on the action, but the subtext is "deal with it." A sidebar provides three additional short hooks in case "uh, so you go on this here adventure" isn't enough for your jaded players. The first, which involves the PCs coming upon a wounded victim of the thieves, should have been the standard hook. The other two, including a vision from one of the PCs' gods, are best avoided.

Most d20 products to date have been plagued with bad interpretations of the d20 rules, in some cases forcing a ton of extra work on the Dungeon Master prior to play. Happily, this is not a flaw in Atlas products, though here Nephew plays fast and loose with the challenge rating system. That will have some effect on experience rewards, but shouldn't upset play too badly. In general, encounters are balanced such that a party of four 1st level characters should handle themselves appropriately. Treasure seems a bit light (the people of Brandon's Bridge offer the princely sum of 100 gp for helping them with their outlaw problem), with a dearth of magical item rewards that might disappoint some players.

If there's a standard flaw in Atlas' generally professional approach, it's in the amateurish *Campaign Cartographer* maps provided with their adventures. Though *Thieves in the Forest* contains a few more yawn-inducing examples, it also comes with a well-rendered two-color painted poster map by Scott Reeves. Rendered in 25mm scale, this map is perfect for pushing your miniatures around, and could easily be reused for any temple/lair your players should happen to come across in the future. Reeves also provides sketchy, moody illustrations that seem perfect for a brooding, dark adventure (which this isn't, but they're still cool to look at).

Unfortunately, the adventure itself is pedestrian. The party walks around the forest, gets attacked, and maybe comes upon a few lairs, usually inhabited by a single opponent. Unless the players are given a copy of the map, they're bound to wander around for some time without having any meaningful encounters. Once they get to the lair, it's "open door, kill bad guy" time. It's not fair to call *Thieves in the Forest* bad. It is fair to call it uninspired, uninspiring, and probably not worth your money.

—ERIK MONA



Thieves in the Forest
A 24-page d20 adventure
By John Nephew
Published by Atlas Games
$8.95

You're in the forest. There are thieves in the forest. You fight thieves. In the forest.

Accessibility:	4
Art:	4
Design:	2
Value:	2

The Hills Rise Wild

What is it about *Call of Cthulhu* that attracts board and card game designers? First there was *Arkham Horror*, then we had *Creatures & Cultists*, *Mythos* and *Cults Around the World*. Many of these games take the essence of the Cthulhu Mythos and turn it into a hilarious comic game. Now, with *The Hills Rise Wild*, we have the latest in this long and distinguished line.

In many ways it's the best of the lot.

Pagan Publishing is famed for its extremely serious *Call of Cthulhu* campaign supplements. But as this game proves, they also have a much less serious side to them. *The Hills Rise Wild's* packaging nicely summarizes the game's ethos thusly: "A Frenzied Fury of Hillbilly Horror!" Using skirmish rules developed by main designer Jesper Myfors, the game uses miniatures and tape-measured movement. Everything you could need for play is included in the box.

Each player, up to a maximum of four, plays a faction of six characters. Their aim is to find the Whateley Seal hidden somewhere in one of the buildings on the map and to make their way to the Whateley Mansion. Once there, they must find the *Necronomicon*, return to their base with it, and summon their monstrous god to win the game. Of course, since the four factions represented are weapon-toting Cthuluesque yokels, a bloodbath is likely to ensue.

The game design is ingenious. Factions start separated from each other by a set of randomly placed game tiles usually forming a 4 x 4 grid. Most game tiles include a building and some terrain features. A card is placed on each building, except for the Whateley Mansion itself, which houses four cards. Upon entering a building (or with special abilities that some characters possess), cards can be looked at and acted upon. Some cards represent cool objects such as "Ole Bessie," a positively lethal "Gatlin' Gun," or the super-destructive "Tee Enn Tee," whilst others are events. Events are either Elective or Mandatory. Elective events often give you the chance to heal wounds or move further than normally possible, whilst Mandatory events are much nastier.

For example, the Mandatory event card, "Tentacle from Thuh Earth!" randomly shunts you back to your own summoning circle, an opponent's summoning circle, or just outright kills the character who finds it. Some of the events affect different factions in different ways, with some being useful for one set of cultists whilst causing other cultists harm—a very neat little touch that really helps to make every game different.

Combat is simple and is based around line-of-sight and proximity. Each character has different strengths, weaknesses and special abilities, all of which add to the manic feel of the game. Games take no more than a couple of hours and the slick feel of the combat system very soon becomes second nature.

I do have a couple of quibbles. The supplied tape measure is extremely flimsy (we managed to break it within five minutes of starting the first playtest). The stand-up card figures aren't pre-punched. Cutting them out took an incredible amount of time. If I'd bought the game at a convention, as I can see lots of people doing, the time taken cutting them out before I could start playing the game would have driven me insane (and not in a fun, H.P. Lovecraft sort of way). If you buy this game, and I strongly recommend you do, allow plenty of time to get everything prepared. Pagan's Web site (http://www.tccorp.com/pagan/index.html) contains lots of different rules variants and pre-designed board layouts, all of which add to the longevity of the game. As a diversion on those nights when you want a break from roleplaying or as a time filler at conventions, *The Hills Rise Wild* is definitely worth a look. With plenty of planned expansions set to allow more players and lots of tweaks to the basic rules, this game is a must-buy for anyone wanting a fast, exciting, and above all hilariously competitive game.

—Simon Taylor

The Hills Rise Wild
A fast-play miniatures/board game
By Jesper Myrfors and John Tynes
with character artwork by
Dennis Detwiller
Published by Pagan Publishing
$34.95

A fantastically original and manically funny miniatures game in which you play Ghouls, Mutants, Deep Ones, and Cultists in a bloody race to be the first to recover the *Necronomicon* from Whateley Mansion and summon your insane, idiot god.

Accessibility:	5
Art:	5
Design:	4
Value:	5

Last Days of Constantinople

A few years back, TSR published a number of AD&D® supplements set in interesting eras of Earth's history. Never strong sellers, the line eventually faded to obscurity. Now, Avalanche Press' *The Last Days of Constantinople*, the first product in recent memory that caters to fans of both history and gaming, delivers far, far more "history" than "game."

First things first. If the author, Dr. Mike Bennighof, has ever played Third Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS,® he certainly didn't retain much from the experience. *Last Days of Constantinople* is filled with some of the most outlandish rules gaffes yet seen in a d20 product. It shouldn't surprise anyone who's paid even casual attention to the d20 "boom" that Bannighof falls miles short of understanding how Challenge Ratings work. It gets far worse. All NPCs have skills, but not all of those skills are accompanied by numbers. Several NPC-classed characters have Charisma scores that would bring tears to the eye of a solar. The rules for Greek fire aren't much more complicated than "if you get hit, you die."

If you can get beyond this, the adventure has a lot to offer. In it, the players act as servants of Pope Nicholas V to deliver weapons and foodstuffs to the besieged Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI, whose city is surrounded by the hostile forces of the Turkish Sultan Mehmet II. The Pope is not completely altruistic in his aid, however, for the PCs have a secondary goal. According to rumor, the emperor recently married the daughter of the King of Georgia, who may or may not have made it to Constantinople before the Turkish attack. If she is in the city, the party is to get her out—the Byzantine Emperor traces his lineage back to Julius Caesar, and his widow will be sought in marriage by every sovereign in the known world. If she were to be controlled by the Pope and his agents. . .

This type of heady political plot rarely finds its way into the background of a one-off D&D® adventure, and the fact that it's based on real world events and personalities gives *Last Days* a resonance lacking in many fantasy scenarios. It doesn't matter that "Empress" Maryia is fictional—she provides a compelling MacGuffin to get the PCs into the action.

Those players looking for detailed encounter-by-encounter run-downs are in for a disappointment. About a quarter of the book sets up Constantinople in its historical context. The rest gives suggestions on running a city under siege, complete with a few decrepit locations such as a corrupt temple, the palace, and a whorehouse. This general development is sprinkled with a few suggested encounters, including a particularly well-realized tunnel fight against Turkish sappers. When used as a general outline upon which to structure a much larger campaign, *Last Days of Constantinople* definitely delivers.

That said, Benninghof seems to focus a little too heavily on debauchery (nearly a quarter of the detailed NPCs are eunochs and whores, and much of the "action" takes place in a brothel). A short section focuses on the gory details of human impaling, and particular attention is paid to the dental hygiene (or lack thereof) of certain male prostitutes crucial to the adventure's plot. Though it never quite manages to step over the line, *Last Days of Constantinople* veers dangerously close to being puerile.

Running the adventure "as is" naturally involves many changes to the D&D rules. To fit with the setting, there should be no sorcerers, no clerics, no bards, no druids, and no nonhumans. Most unfortunately, there should be no women among the party. If you can stomach that, *Last Days of Constantinople* is worth a look.—ERIK MONA

The Last Day of Constantinople
A 46-page d20 adventure
By Dr. Mike Bennighof
Published by Avalanche Press, Ltd
$9.95 US

Enter the capital of the Byzantine Empire on the eve of its destruction by hostile Turkish forces. Drop off a shipload of weapons and food, steal the emperor's wife, and get out of town before the walls fall down.

Accessibility:	4
Art:	2
Design:	2
Value:	3

The Spear of the Lohgin

After couple pages of Paradigm Concepts' first d20 foray, I was pretty impressed. The project treated itself to a second-hand but evocative Brom cover—a good move. The layout was a little cluttered, but better than most d20 offerings, and the interior art was none too shabby. More importantly, I was truly impressed by the story and the organization of the adventure.

The Spear of the Lohgin takes your favorite 4-5th–level characters into a twisted plot involving a family's fall to evil. In this adventure the PCs unravel the dark legacy of Jude Lohgin, the deformed second son of the just Lord Lohgin. The Lohgin family was blessed by the servant of a good god, Numeh the Valinor, and were the hereditary keepers of the angelic Numeh's holy spear. Jude, unlike his forefathers, spurned that legacy and put into motion a plan to destroy his kin by using the holy spear to open a gate to Hell. Jude would have succeeded if it weren't for interference of his brother, Vir, who ruined his evil plans at a tremendous cost—the sacrifice of his vassals, his ancestral home, and the spear that made his family renown. Though oft thwarted, infernal powers are always patient. Now, centuries later, dark powers move again to unleash Hell in Old Ashvan, the ancient Lohgin estate, and the PCs may take the role of either pawn or adversary to Jude's dark master.

The adventure is divided into "soft" and "hard" encounters, giving the option of a fast hit-the-points—based dungeon crawl, or a twisting roleplaying road of intrigue climaxed by the delve into Old Ashvan. Evil DMs may want to increase the challenges of the encounters, or add a few monsters here and there; *Lohgin* seems a tad too soft for its own good, especially if you plan to run experienced power gamers through it.

Always a boon, the stat blocks for adversaries are easy to read, and the adventure supplies an appendix for NPC stats and another for magic items. Everything the DM needs is at his or her fingertips on each page.

I am sorry to say that the maps are rushed *Campaign Cartographer* jobs, which, unfortunately, are becoming the staple of independently produced d20 adventures. Also the map of the Login Stronghold interior does to match the exterior view. Nit-picky? Yeah, but have you met a player who's not? And while the art is pretty good, it does a fairly poor job of actually illustrating the adventure, and seems more an after thought than an integrated part of *Lohgin*.

On a second reading of Lohgin, the little weird things began to bug me. An inordinate amount of "boxed text" riddles most of the pages. Sometimes the boxed text has the annoying habit of telling the PCs what they are doing, sometimes it is filled with inane ramblings of a Scobby Doo-ish villain ("You Fools! If you had just left us alone, I could have fed off these two for days! You've ruined everything!" And I would have gotten away with it, if it wasn't for you meddling kids!). The dialogued boxed text only detracts from the real fun of this adventure—the *Diablo*-like crawl that leads the PCs toward a gate to Hell and a fight with a demon. Other detractors include small d20 rules errors throughout the adventure, and the specter of Second Edition edition D&D popping up here and there. There are references to 0-level fighters, specifying that magic weapons of a certain plus needing to hit special creatures instead of using Third Edition damage reduction, and providing experience point values for monsters rather than calculating the Encounter Level. Will those things detract from a fun afternoon romp? No, but they are things you may want to look for and fix if you run your game for a bunch of d20 sticklers.

In the end if you're looking for an adventure with all the things you have come to expect from your favorite next-door neighbor's game, *The Spear of the Lohgin* is a must have. If you're looking for a night or two of dungeon crawl fun with an interesting back-story, check it out. If you're looking for an adventure that will live for years of well-worn infamy on your game shelf and in the minds of your players, *The Spear of the Lohgin* falls just shy of the mark. —STEPHEN RADNEY-MACFARLAND

The Spear of the Lohgin
A 32-page d20 System adventure
By Jarad Fennell
Published by Paradigm Concepts
$9.99 US

The Loghin family left a dark legacy and something rotten in their old manor. Will the PCs stop the maddness, or will they fall victim to its sway? An adventure for characters levels 4-6.

Accessibility:	4
Art:	3
Design:	3
Value:	4

Electronic Potpourri

BY ED GIBSON

Welcome back to Web Wanderings. The first topic for this month is email. While you may have an email address or two offered through your ISP, have you ever thought about creating email addresses for characters in your home campaign or RPGA LIVING™ campaigns? I currently have email addresses for characters in several BIRTHRIGHT® play-by-email games. I also have addresses for my LIVING CITY™ and LIVING GREYHAWK™ PCs. Many of my accounts are through www.yahoo.com—I find it has the most user-friendly interface of the systems I've encountered. I also have some through www.hotmail.com and www.aerospaceonline.com. For a large list of free email services, see www.emailaddresses.com/. You have to register to set up a free email account (please consider completing the registration form to be an interesting exercise in real life roleplaying) and put up with advertisements appended to the messages, but that's a small price to pay. Most services offer at least two megabytes of free email storage and are eager to sell you more storage space.

I've mentioned web-cams briefly in previous columns, but let's take a closer look. A good place to start is www.earthcam.com. This site has links to hundreds of web-cams grouped into categories. The refresh rates (how often a new picture is displayed) are listed, so you know when to expect a change. There are scenic cams from a variety of locations; Bourbon Street in New Orleans, the Texas School Book Depository in Dallas, the Chicago skyline, the Seattle Space Needle, and Seattle from the Space Needle. In most cases, there are multiple camera views available to allow you to get a better feel for the city or place in question. It's not the same as being there in person, but offers more insight than merely looking up the city in a tourist guide. There are no cameras listed at Wizards of the Coast or the RPGA® Network, but Renton, Washington can be viewed at pullmanpacific.com/cams.html.

Another set of cameras cover tourist attractions, from Old Faithful in Yellowstone Park to Disney World in Florida, allowing the extra detail you need to give a truly convincing description to your players. Traffic cams, news cams—there's something for everyone. The weird and bizarre cams section of earthcam.com offers a variety of off-beat locations, ranging from pets and animals (rats, ants, bees, ferrets, llamas, chickens, cows, etc), taxicabs from New York City and Berlin, a freezer, an ashtray, a couple of tattoo parlors, in fact, just about anything you can imagine has a web camera pointed at it.

Do you need to print a calendar for a given year? Perhaps as background for a LIVING DEATH™ or other modern adventure? Visit www.timeanddate.com/calendar to print a calendar for a year you specify. You can include holidays and phases of the moon so your intrepid investigators can attempt to discover the link between seemingly random killings.

Would you like to know what your alignment is in real life? Take the Alignment Quiz at www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~whuang/align.html. While it's not of any scientific value, it might give you an insight into the various alignments. In addition, haven't you always wanted to tell one of those annoying phone solicitors, "I'd like to help you, but I'm neutral evil and I don't see anything in it for me."

The next site, http://www.ruprecht.com/psychictest.html, comes to us courtesy of Jim Clunie on the DARK MATTER® mailing list. It purports to test your psychic ability. The test uses the familiar cards (star, triangle, square, wavy lines) which are used in standard ESP tests. However, a computer is randomly picking one of the cards and it's really tough to read a computer's mind, so I'm not sure what it actually measures. However, it is fun to try, and the results can be interesting (I managed 5 out of 10 or twice as many successes as would be expected for random guessing). If you are interested in subscribing to the DARK MATTER mailing list, visit the Wizards community site, www.wizards.com/lists for instructions on joining a number of mailing lists related to gaming, Wizards of the Coast products, and the RPGA.

This column is written to give you ideas to use in your campaigns and get your creative juices flowing. If you run across an interesting site or have a related idea which would benefit other RPGA members, send it along to Polyhedron@wizards.com.

C L U B

2000 NETWORK CLUBS DECATHLON WRAP-UP

The 2000 Clubs Decathlon competition was the largest held to date, with 36 sanctioned clubs and 840 members participating (a full listing of participating clubs appears at the end of this article). Network HQ got in on the fun as well as an unofficial straw man, competing in 9 out of 10 events. When the dust settled, it was Australia's Naughty Weasels who came out on top, besting longtime powerhouses (and last year's champions), the PM Players. The redoubtable Death Warmed Over placed third in what shaped up to be one of the most competitive competitions in RPGA® history.

The 2000 competition was broken into three categories, from which clubs selected 10 events from a list of 18. The categories were **Tournament Play** (play of selected RPGA tournaments at conventions), **Creative** (game material design), and **Service** (performing service for the RPGA Network). Each event was worth between 1 and 6 points, and the overall winner was determined by the club with the highest point total.

What follows is an event-by-event summary of the Decathlon, broken out by category. The points each club earned will be summarized at the end of the article.

TOURNAMENT PLAY EVENTS

The Tournament Play portion of the Decathlon was held at gaming conventions during the year 2000. There were two types of tournaments in the category, **Individual** and **Team Play**.

Individual events measured the placement of club designees in selected tournaments. 3 points were awarded for a first place finish, 2 points for a second place finish, and 1 point was awarded for participation.

Team Play events pitted clubs against each other in specially designed team tournaments. A team could earn 6 points for a first place finish, 4 points for a second place finish, and 2 points for participating.

What follows is a month by-month record of clubs, conventions, and tournaments for this portion of the competition. Check the RPGA Web site (www.rpga.com) for more detailed information on the Tournament Play portion of the Decathlon

JANUARY

WINTER FANTASY™ (Fort Wayne, IN, Jan. 13-16—Individual Play, *Lost in the Translation* a two-round AD&D® classic scenario, by Greg Dreher)
2 pts: Gamers Association of Mid-America (GAM), PM Players
1 pt: Company of the House, Council of Wyrms, Ottawa Society of Questors, Investigators, and Pundits (OSQUIP)

FEBRUARY

Genghis Con XXI (Denver, CO, Feb. 10-13—Individual Play, *Roadkill* a two-round AD&D classic scenario, by Larry Cormeir)
2 pts: PM Players

MARCH

Branscon (Branson, MO, Mar. 3-5—Individual Play, *Gamble in the Alps*, a one-round AD&D LIVING DEATH™ scenario by Dan Donnelly)
3 pts: GAM
1 pt: Springfield Area Gamers Association (SAGA)

APRIL

Weekend in Ravens Bluff (WIRB)(21 sites, throughout April—Individual Play, *Dragon's Spirit*, a one-round AD&D LIVING CITY™ scenario, by Troy Daniels and Cindy Mullins)
3 pts: Dedicated Oahu Gaming Society (DOGS), PM Players
2 pts: The Seattle Mob

Norwescon 23 (Seattle, WA, April 20-23—Team Play, *A Hiking We Will Go*[1], a one-round AD&D team scenario, by Ted Stadtlander)
6 pts: The Seattle Mob

MAY

Bencon (Denver, CO, May 25-28—Team Play, *Hottest Blood*, a one-round AD&D team scenario, by Robert Wiese)
6 pts: PM Players

JUNE

*Dragon*Con 2000* (Atlanta, GA, June 29-July 2—Individual Play, *The Killing Fields*, a one-round AD&D classic scenario, by Richard E. Reiter III)
3 pts: Network HQ Cheaters Club
2 pts: DAWN, Travelers, Inc.
1 pt: ARC Fellowship

Team Play, *In The Blinking Of An Eye* (1 round AD&D team scenario, by Reynolds Jones)
2 pts: DAWN, Threat of Ghouls, Travelers, Inc.

JULY

Origins (Columbus, OH, July 13-16—Individual Play, Misty Mountain Hoop, a one-round Alternity® Gamma World® classic scenario, by Mike Selinker)
3 pts: DWO
2 pts: DOGS

Team Play, *Heirs of Elemental Evil* (a two-round AD&D team scenario, by William Cuffe)
4 pts: DOGS
2 pts: Clan Yeoman

AUGUST
GEN CON® Game Fair (Milwaukee, WI, Aug 10-13—Individual Play, *Cat's Meow*, a one-round D&D® classic scenario, by Steve Hardinger)
3 pts: DOGS, DWO, GAM
1 pt: ARC Fellowship

Team Play, *Do Me A Favor* (a two-round D&D team scenario, by Scott J. Magner)
6 pts: Clan Yeoman
2 pts: DWO, FORGE

SEPTEMBER
Phenomenon (Acton, ACT, Sep 30-Oct 2—Individual Play, *Cat's Meow*, a one-round D&D classic scenario, by Steve Hardinger)
1 pt: The Naughty Weasels

Team Play, *Do Me A Favor* (a two-round D&D team scenario, by Scott J. Magner)
2 pts: The Naughty Weasels

Shorecon (Cherry Hill, NJ, Sep 28-Oct 1—Individual Play, *Dragon's Deep*, a one-round LIVING CITY scenario, by Troy Daniels)
1 pt: DWO, Travelers, Inc.

CREATIVE EVENTS

Creative events asked members of Network Clubs to write some form of gaming content, such as a tournament, magic item, etc. A panel of judges graded entries for each event, with the highest-scoring entry taking first place. Clubs that submitted multiple entries for a specific event had the highest-scored entry compared to the other clubs' entries. A club could earn between 1 and 6 points from a Creative event, depending upon the event.

Wes Nicholson graciously accepts a Decathlon trophy for Australia's Naughty Weasels.

What follows is a list of events by month, with the clubs entered for each and the points earned by each club. Check the RPGA Web site (www.rpga.com) for detailed descriptions of the events and further information on the individual entries.

JANUARY—BEST LEGENDARY WEAPON
Twenty-one clubs entered this event, making it both the biggest Decathlon event of 2000 and the largest participation recorded for any Decathlon event we can find.[2] The challenge was to design a weapon left behind by the heroes of yore.
4 pts: The Naughty Weasels
2 pts: PM Players, Network HQ[4]
1 pt: ARC Fellowship; Clarksville Gamemaster's Guild; Company of the Rose[3]; Council of Wyrms; DOGS; DWO; Evansville Gaming Guild; Fellowship of the Blade; FORGE; Gaming Enthusiast's Association of Rolla (GEAR); Magma Gamers; OSQUIP; Overkill, Inc.; Shadow Company Gaming Guild (SCGG); Silicon Knights; The Seattle Mob; Threat of Ghouls; YSU Gaming Guild

FEBRUARY—BEST NEWSLETTER FOR THE FIRST QUARTER
Eighteen clubs sent in newsletters describing what they were doing, and what they were planning on doing. Oddly enough, most of the content had to do with roleplaying games. **Note:** We like newsletters. *A lot*. If your club produces and mails a newsletter, please consider sending a copy to Network HQ.
4 pts: The Naughty Weasels
2 pts: PM Players
1 pt: Black Hand Gaming Society (BHGS); Company of the Rose[3]; DAWN; DOGS; Evansville Gaming Guild; Fellowship of the Black Spot; House Rookhaven; Magma Gamers; Overkill, Inc.; The Phoenix Alliance; The Roleplayers Guild of Kansas City (RPGKC); SAGA; SCGG; The Shadow Knights; Threat of Ghouls; YSU Gaming Guild

C L U B

Former CARP coordinator Jae Walker runs a shocking game of LIVING FORCE.™

MARCH—MONSTER MASH, PART ONE

Clubs were asked to design and test monsters, using a set of guidelines presented by the Network. The best monster from each club was eligible to participate in a special competition at GEN CON.

5 pts: DWO
3 pts: Waterdeep Boys Club
1 pt: Clarksville Gamemasters Guild; Company of the Rose[3]; Council of Wyrms; DOGS; Magma Gamers; Northeast Oregon Gamers, Incredibly (NEOGI); Overkill, Inc.; SCGG; OSQUIP; RPGKC

APRIL—BEST ONE-ROUND TOURNAMENT

Twelve clubs submitted 17 tournaments, ranging from the silly to the sublime. After days of deliberation, our event judges decided this event was too close to call, and declared a tie.

5 pts: ARC Fellowship and The Naughty Weasels (tie)
3 pts: Network HQ Cheaters Club[4]
1 pt: BHGS; DAWN; DOGS; DWO; GAM; Magma Gamers; PM Players; RPGKC; YSU Gaming Guild

MAY—BUILDING THE PERFECT GAMEMASTER

Clubs were asked to write an essay describing the best qualities of a GM.

5 pts: House Rookhaven
3 pts: PM Players
1 pt: Travelers, Inc.; YSU Gaming Guild

JUNE—BEST MULTI-ROUND TOURNAMENT

Using the same criteria for the one round event, clubs were asked to write a multiple-round scenario for the tournament program.

6 pts: The Naughty Weasels; Network HQ Cheaters Club[4]
4 pts: PM Players
2 pt: DAWN; DWO; Magma Gamers

JULY—BEST NEW DECATHLON EVENT

For the last several years, we've asked Network clubs to design a piece of the competition for the year to come.

4 pts: The Naughty Weasels
2 pts: SCGG
1 pt: House Rookhaven

AUGUST—MONSTER MASH REDUX

After the monsters from the Monster Mash Decathlon event duked it out, clubs were asked to write up the experiences of their creatures and send them to us.

4 pts: DWO

SEPTEMBER—BEST NEW FAITH FOR THE DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS® GAME

Clubs were asked to design a new faith for the D&D game.

4pts: The Seattle Mob
2 pts: Travelers, Inc.
1 pt: CARP; The Naughty Weasels

SERVICE EVENTS

Service events track those club activities that bettered the Network as a whole. Each service event tracked a club's participation over a period of time, as determined by the club's roster and results turned in to Network HQ by the posted deadlines. Each event offered between 1 and 6 points.

What follows is a list of the service events, the reporting periods for each, and the clubs that participated. Check out the RPGA Web site (www.rpga.com) for a more detailed look at the 2000 service events.

MOST ROUNDS JUDGED

<u>First Period: Jan. 1–April 30</u>

4 pts: GAM
2 pts: DAWN; Network HQ Cheaters Club[5]
1 pt: SCGG; The Seattle Mob

<u>Second Period: May 1–Aug. 31</u>

4 pts: DAWN
2 pts: Council of Wyrms
1 pt: Network HQ Cheaters Club[5]; OSQUIP; RPGKC; SCGG; The Seattle Mob

Third Period: Sep. 1–Nov. 1
4 pts: The Naughty Weasels
2 pts: DAWN; Network HQ Cheaters Club[5]
1 pt: DOGS; RPGKC; SCGG; The Seattle Mob

MOST NON-LIVING™ TOURNAMENTS PLAYED

The club with the highest ratio of play instances to club members was judged the winner.
6 pts: DAWN
4 pts: RPGKC
1 pt: Council of Wyrms; OSQUIP; Network HQ Cheaters Club[5]; PM Players; SCGG; The Seattle Mob

MOST LIVING GREYHAWK™ PLAYERS

This event measured the participation of club members in the Network's newest (at the time) LIVING™ campaign. Ties for first place were possible, although only one club had 100% participation.
5 pts: The Naughty Weasels
3 pts: DWO
1 pt: Council of Wyrms; DAWN; DOGS; OSQUIP; Network HQ Cheaters Club[5]; RPGKC; SCGG; The Seattle Mob; Travelers, Inc.

FINAL STANDINGS

Here are the clubs that participated in the 2000 Network Clubs Decathlon, in the order they finished. The number listed in parentheses is the total number of members in the club.

Naughty Weasels (11): 36 points over 10 events
PM Players (48): 26 points over 10 events
Death Warmed Over (25): 25 points over 10 events
Dragons & Wizards Network (11): 23 points over 10 events
Network HQ Cheaters Club (5): 21 points over 9 events
D.O.G.S (22): 18 points over 10 events
The Seattle Mob (48): 18 points over 9 events
Gamers Association of Mid-America (7): 13 points over 5 events
Roleplayers Guild of Kansas City (35): 10 points over 7 events
Travelers, Inc. (20): 9 points over 6 events
Shadow Company Gaming Guild(7): 8 points over 7 events
Clan Yeoman (7): 8 points over 2 events
Council of Wyrms (6): 7 points over 6 events
ARC Fellowship (64): 7 points over 3 events
House Rookhaven (12): 7 points over 3 events
OSQUIP (19): 6 points over 6 events
Magma Gamers (17): 6 points over 5 events
YSU Gaming Guild (6): 4 points over 4 events
Threat of Ghouls (12): 4 points over 3 events
ORC Horde (48): 3 points over 3 events
Overkill, Inc. (14): 3 points over 3 events
FORGE (15): 3 points over 2 events
Waterdeep Boys Club (10): 3 points over 1 event
Black Hand Gaming Society (15): 2 points over 2 events
Clarksville GameMasters Guild (43): 2 points over 2 events
Evansville Gaming Guild (51): 2 points over 2 events
S.A.G.A. (17): 2 points over 2 events
Capitol Area Role Players (103):1 point over 1 event
Company of the House (7): 1 point over 1 event
Fellowship of the Black Spot (17): 1 point over 1 event
Fellowship of the Blade (15): 1 point over 1 event
G.E.A.R. (10): 1 point over 1 event
NEOGI (25): 1 point over 1 event
Phoenix Alliance, Inc. (87): 1 point over 1 event
Shadow Knights (14): 1 point over 1 event
Silicon Knights(12): 1 point over 1 event

FOOTNOTES

1This event originally played as a part of the 1999 Decathlon, but the scarcity of Team events necessitated duplication.

2RPGA Network HQ only has records for the Clubs Decathlon going back to 1996. If anyone has details on competitions previous to that time, please send them in, we'd love to have them.

3The Company of the Rose joined forces later in the year with another Oregon Club, the Orc Squad, to form a new club. The new club is listed under the name of the Orc Horde.

4For Creative events, the main field of entries were evaluated and scored first, and then HQ's entry was compared to the winner.

5For Service events, Network HQ participation was recorded after the participating clubs were scored, and then compared the winner.

Heart of the RPGA

WINTER FANTASY (US)

Ft. Wayne, Indiana, USA
January 25-28, 2001

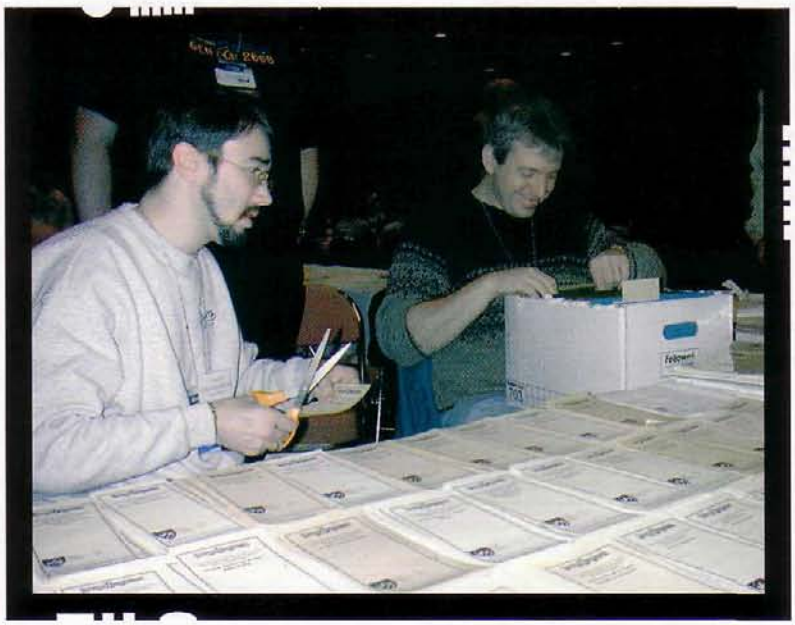
If the GEN CON® Game Fair is the heart of the RPGA Network, WINTER FANTASY™ is definitely its soul. Every year, members brave the frigid wasteland of the American Midwest to gather for a weekend of games, seminars, and good times. The convention gives the RPGA® staff a chance to look back at the year that was and look forward to the year that will be. WINTER FANTASY is *our* convention. It's managed by the RPGA staff, and all events are run by RPGA members. The generally laid-back atmosphere of the show makes WINTER FANTASY one of the most *social* gaming events of the year, with the good company at least as strong a draw as the excellent games.

This year, nearly 1,200 members attended the show, many taking advantage of the fact that admission was free to all who preregistered. On day one, the hot topic seemed to be the conversion of the LIVING CITY™—Raven's Bluff campaign to the new edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules. As soon as the official convention began, players swarmed the LC conversion booth, eager to pick up their brand new Third Edition magic item certificates. Immediate demand far outstripped supply, and kept a stalwart crew of about a dozen volunteers busy day and night printing out certificates for members who came from all edges of Earth to refill their binders.

Thursday saw the official birth LIVING FORCE™, the Network's newest shared-world campaign. Hundreds of gamers participated in the *Eye of the Sun* "trilogy" of three four-hour adventures, receiving special galactic passport props that they'll be able to get stamped each time they play a campaign event over the next year. Before the weekend was out, the campaign held its first-ever interactive, which boasted a veritable "cantina" worth of in-costume gamers exploring the brand new Culatin system, home of the LIVING FORCE campaign.

But even the newest of shared-world campaigns would be nothing without the original phenomenon that is the LIVING CITY. WINTER FANTASY saw the debut of the first Third Edition LC scenarios, including a finished-in-the-nick-of-time two-round opus by Network HQ mainstay Robert Wiese. Called *Amber's Story*, the adventure brought to a close the saga of

Pinnacle Player phenomenon Jason Buhlman rakes in another award.



David Thompson and David Wall man the popular Living Greyhawk Activity Center.

the warlord Myrkyssa Jelan, the villain of LC's infamous (and first) story arc.

The Network's juggernaut LIVING GREYHAWK™ campaign saw plenty of activity, too, with the debut of a new Adaptable scenario and the LIVING GREYHAWK Activity Center, at which members could purchase equipment and spells for their characters. It's a good thing such services were on hand, because guests of honor Monte Cook and Andy Collins, writer and editor of the forthcoming *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* superadventure, brought along a portion of their top-secret product to pit the heroes of LG against mysterious cultists inhabiting the most famous moathouse in the history of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. While volunteers attempted to muster the hordes of eager gamers into the event, a parade of dozens of the most seasoned judges in the Network, led by Monte and Andy, marched into the exhibit hall chanting "six men enter, no men leave!" Quite a few pale faces followed, and within an hour, characters started hitting the dungeon floor. Let's just say Hommlet's temple of St. Cuthbert did a fair amount of business at the show...

The convention offered plenty of action to Classic gamers, as well, with feature, benefit, team, master, and grand master D&D® events, as well as characters-provided tournaments for *Call of Cthulhu*, *Deadlands*, *Pendragon*, and more. The friendly folks of Network club Game Base 7 were on hand, offering numerous roleplaying and board game events.

Saturday night saw two special events—RPGA Worldwide Manager David Wise's "State of the Network" member address (reproduced elsewhere in this issue) and a special party commemorating the 20th anniversary of the RPGA Network. The latter featured a whole lot of cake, free soda, and far, far more cheese than any group of 1,000+ human beings could possibly consume.

Grandmaster judge Tony Scalise runs a group of foolhardy adventures through the Moathouse.

By the end of the convention, hundreds of games had been played, and a fair amount of money had been spent in the dealer room. But there was one more important event yet to occur. At every big US show, the RPGA holds special "Pinnacle" competitions, which recognize the judge and player with the best average score over five or more events. The Pinnacle Judge for this year's WINTER FANTASY was Canada's Chuck Wharton, who averaged 174.4 (of 180) over 5 events. In the Player category, Wisconsinite Jason Buhlman cleaned up yet another trophy, averaging 25.24 points over 5 events. Buhlman has won just under a half-dozen Pinnacle events over the past two years. Keep an eye on the pages of *Polyhedron* for more on his amazing streak.

After four exhausting and exhilarating days of gaming, the curtain fell on another WINTER FANTASY. Details on next year's show are still in flux, but WINTER FANTASY will return to the Ft. Wayne Hilton and Grand Wayne Center in 2002. Don't miss it!

LIVING FORCE players were treated to a special passport prop for use at events throughout the year.